The future of electronic entertainment Issue#117

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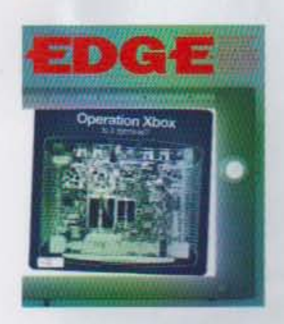
Future hardware,
Show, Developer
Previewed:
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SOCOM, Star Fox
Ratchet & Clank,
UT2003, Colin McRae
WRC II Extreme, Red
Plus: the making of







The future of electronic entertainment



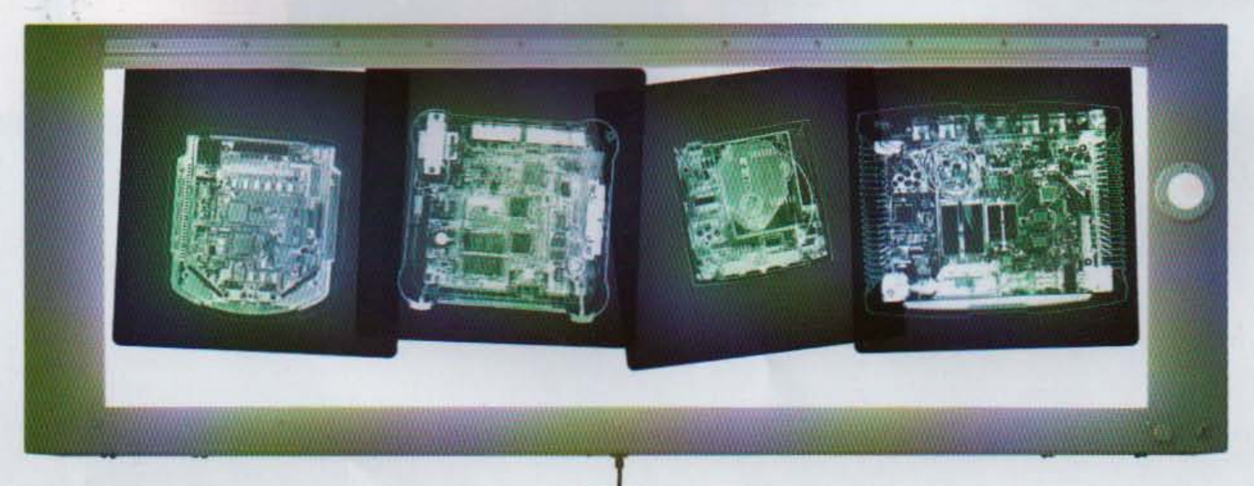
Did the Xbox owners among you notice that the tie tags used for the joypad cables are colour (green and black) and texturally coded (rubber)? It may seem a trivial detail, but as a demonstration of just how serious Microsoft's determination in invading the videogame market is, it's significant stuff.

But then that's no surprise. The inclusion of four joypad ports, a hard drive, broadband support, 60Hz playback, anamorphic compatibility, Dolby Digital 5.1 integration – even the generous length of joypad cable – was as clear an indication that the Redmont giant had been playing close attention to the competition as you would expect to get.

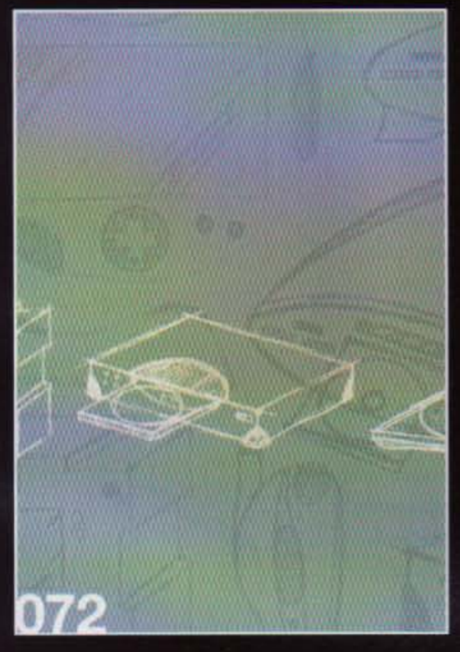
Observation alone is no guarantee of success, of course. Look at Sega's Dreamcast – four joypad ports, modem, 60Hz (software reliant) playback... in fact, take another look: strong performance in the US, so-so in Europe, dismal in Japan; ease of programming; initial batch of software comprising alarming numbers of weak cross-platform ports (PC for DC, PS2 for Xbox); even down to questionable joypad design the similarities surrounding these two machines are uncanny. One other thing they share is the loss of support from publishers (over)reacting to the predictable fact that a new console isn't selling in PlayStation numbers.

Of course, the one thing they don't share is the same manufacturer and therefore, the same resources. To put it into some perspective, if the European promotion of Dreamcast is anything to go on it's not difficult to imagine Sega's entire marketing budget for its 128bit console amounting to less than Microsoft's annual stationery bill. The cost of brand awareness will hardly come as a surprise to the Windows creator and a phenomenal amount of dollars will have been budgeted to ensure this venture works. Money, after all, is one thing Microsoft does possess.

Just as well, given the company's penchant for fancy tie tags.



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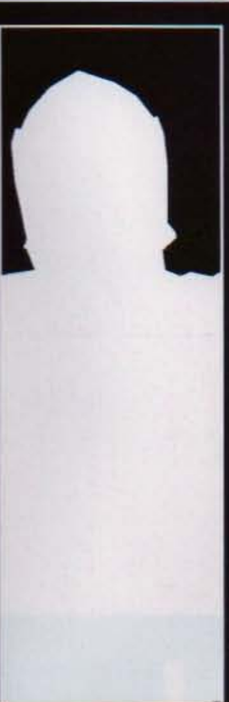
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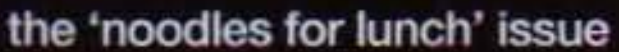
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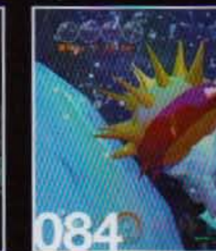




















Regulars

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Testscreen

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"We're not talking about how long you're going to live, honey, we're talking about slow you're going to die."

News and views from e-entertainment's cutting edge





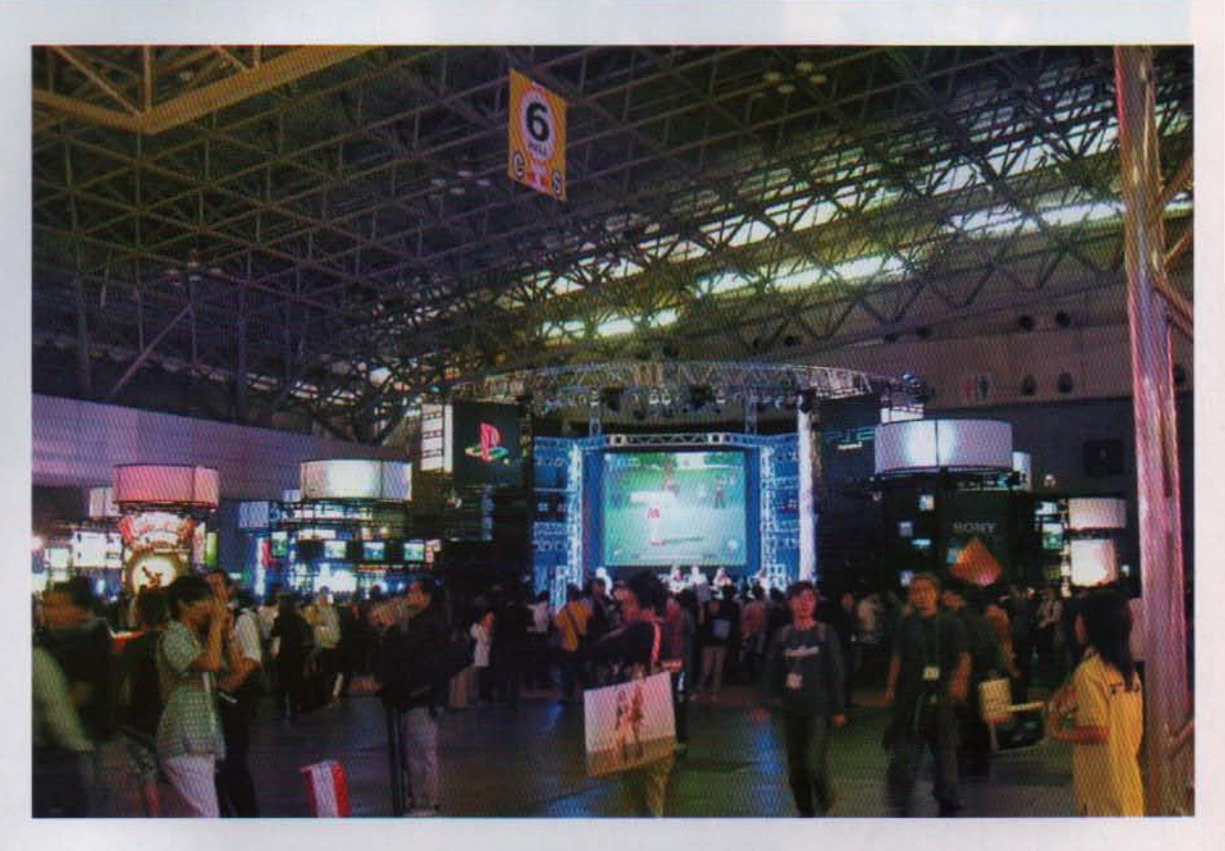


Tokyo Game Show enthrals but doesn't surprise

The newly annual event witnesses little in the way of major new product launches, but demonstrates the unparalleled vibrancy of the Japanese industry

This year's Tokyo Game Show, which took place over the weekend of September 20–22 at the Makuhari Messe convention centre, proved to be both inspiring and dispiriting. It was inspiring because, in spite of the difficult economic conditions in which the Japanese videogame industry finds itself, the sheer quality and range of software, and the breadth of the audience for that software were remarkable. However, it was dispiriting because it highlighted the narrow audience and current climate of creative conservatism in the west. Indeed, although there were few major announcements or surprises at the show, the exhibits demonstrated a confidence in the medium and a willingness to take risks that, broadly speaking, is missing in the west.

The move to make the show an annual event rather than a biannual one, as it has been in previous years, clearly paid off. Although it was smaller than it has been in the past in terms of floor space, there was a greater number of exhibitors, a greater number of titles on display and a greater number of visitors than has been the case in recent years. Ostensibly the show was a disappointment, with no major new launches announced, and several high-profile games conspicuous by their absence. However, it was difficult to be disappointed with the show's unique combination of videogame esoterica, audience enthusiasm (with cosplay participation) and random acts of peculiarity (such as Konami's decision to feature a professional speed-eater on its stand, for example).



"It was difficult to be disappointed with the combination of videogame esoterica, audience enthusiasm and random acts of peculiarity"

Perhaps one of the most peculiar features was the amount of interest being shown at the Xbox stand, which was positively swarming with visitors for the duration of the exhibition. It was strange to see such a healthy level of curiosity towards a console that was being outsold by both the PSone and Bandai's SwanCrystal during the week of the show. Crucially though, Microsoft has so far been unable to convert this curiosity into retail sales, and it's not clear that it will be able to do so in the near future despite its considerable efforts to publicise the console and its forthcoming Xbox Live service (see Big in Japan).

Nevertheless, the entrance to the Makuhari Messe was once again festooned in Xbox livery, while dignitaries such as Ed Fries looked on as hordes of PVC-clad Xbox girls demonstrated the console's online function with the help of enclosed demo pods.

In addition, the software on display at the company's stand was of a generally high standard. Among the titles that impressed or intrigued were the beautiful MMRPG, *True Fantasy Live Online* and the *Seaman*-like (but potentially sexually chauvinistic) AI experiment, *N.U.D.E.*. And it was a smart move to give away a disk containing some exceptional demos; *O.TO.GI* (arguably the most immediately appealing title on any platform at the show, see p32), *Crimson Sea* (p36) and *Panzer Dragoon Orta* (p40) among them. There were disappointments, such as *Kakuto Chojin*, which continues to do little to distinguish itself from every other 3D beat 'em up currently available, and online shooter, *Muzzle Flash*, which looked like a poor man's *SOCOM: US Navy SEALs* (p86).

Microsoft was also giving away a DVD containing gameplay movies, prefaced by some rather inexplicable and bizarre live action sequences of a green-haired girl running around a warehouse. Although this featured a lot of promising games, including a rare appearance for *Soul Calibur II* (pronouncedly absent from the rest of the show), the Xbox Live section did little to suggest that the service will shift units in the short-term. While a barely localised promotional video (originally shown at Milia) probably alienated Japanese users it also demonstrated the potential features of Xbox Live using a couple of spurious games – suggesting that it will be a while before these features are included in real titles.

But the short-term viability of Xbox Live wouldn't matter so much were it not for Sony's massive dominance of the Japanese market. Walking round the streets of Akihabara during the week of the show was eerily reminiscent of the triumph of VHS over Betamax. A significant



This year's show occupied a smaller amount of floor space, but there was no shortage of big name franchises

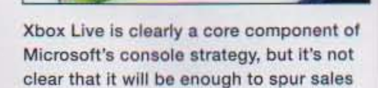








The Xbox stand generated a lot of interest, but the console continues to underperform at retail. Elsewhere, there was a focus on mobile gaming and interesting peripherals



Xbox Live is clearly a core component of Microsoft's console strategy, but it's not clear that it will be enough to spur sales

proportion of stores are currently only stocking PlayStation software, while those that are selling Xbox and GameCube software are devoting minimal shelf-space to heavily discounted titles, and few are actually selling Xbox hardware. Which is presumably why Sony felt confident enough to adopt a rather low-key approach to the Tokyo Game Show. There was little of the razzmatazz that characterised the Xbox stand, and only a handful of new software on display. *Dark Chronicle* and the newly upgraded BB browser were the main focus on the elevated stage area, while elsewhere on the stand, the few playable demos included *Space Fisherman*, *Arc the Lad* and *XI Go*, while video footage promoted *Ratchet & Clank* (p88).

Of course, another reason Sony could afford an understated presence is due to the unrivalled thirdparty support that it enjoys; there were enough PlayStation2 titles at the show without Sony needing to blow its own trumpet. Sega's transition to multiplatform developer continues unabated, for example, but the company's largest area of focus is clearly Sony's hardware.

Dreamcast conversions, such as *Roommania*, *Virtua Tennis 2* and *F355* rubbed shoulders with updated versions of the company's lucrative sports licences, such as *NFL2003* and *NBA2003*, as well as franchises such as *Shinobi*, *Virtual On Marz* (featuring a less convoluted control scheme than that of its predecessors), and *Get Bass Battle*. The company's Xbox line-up, consisting of *Panzer Dragoon Orta*, *The House of the Dead III* and *Sega GT* looked rather scrawny by comparison.

And Nintendo didn't fare much better, receiving only an updated version of *Skies of Arcadia*, *Super Monkey Ball 2* and *Sonic Mega Collection*. Still, the latter is a fascinating attempt to transform Sega's illustrious back catalogue into a revenue stream, which will be worth watching in the coming months.

Sony support

Sega wasn't the only big name publisher to be displaying a PlayStation2 bias though. Capcom hosted playable demos of several compelling titles on the platform, including *Devil May Cry 2* and *Clock Tower 3*, while video footage promoted *Breath of Fire V*. Still, GameCube did get a look in thanks to a playable demo of *Biohazard 0*, and some lab-coated female cosplay promotion. Konami's offering was similarly PlayStation2 heavy, with *Silent Hill 3*, *Anubis: Zone of the Enders*, *Metal Gear Solid 2 Substance*, *Winning Eleven 6* and *Contra* all on show, while over at the affiliated Genki stand, there were several PlayStation2 driving games being demonstrated. Likewise, Square, Enix and Bandai all lent their considerable weight in software development to Sony's hardware with the likes of *Unlimited Saga* and *Star Ocean 3*.

If Microsoft did receive any cheer, it was from the likes of From Software and Koei,



Sony's official PlayStation2 presence was rather muted, concentrating on a new BB browser and new hardware colours, but the console easily dominated thirdparty offerings










Among the games that stood out at the show were (clockwise from top left) From Software's *O.TO.GI*, SCEI's *Dragon Chronicle*, *Sonic Mega Collection* by Sega, Tecmo's *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball*, Capcom's *Devil May Cry 2* and Korean developer NCSoft's *Lineage II*

both publishers of considerable repute in Japan, and both apparently still committed to the Xbox. From Software's demonstrations of *Murakumo* and *Armored Core 3 Silent Line* (the latter a PlayStation2 exclusive) proved particularly popular, thanks to the use of appropriately themed pneumatic VR pods. Tecmo is also still clearly committed to Microsoft, demonstrating yet more mildly titillating *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* and announcing a new title called *Dead or Alive Code: Cronus*.

Poor showing

The only significant disappointments this year were the relatively poor showing from Namco and Sammy. The latter had little on show that was of interest and chose to focus on *Guilty Gear XX*, while the former also chose to show very little apart from *Mr Driller: Drill Land* on GameCube. It's a shame because it apparently has a number of interesting projects currently on the go, including *Soul Calibur II*, *MotoGP 3* and an as yet unnamed motor racing game.

Aside from Xbox-related curiosity and the obvious dominance of PS2, the two most pronounced trends at this year's expo were the attendance of an unprecedented number of foreign Asian companies, and an emphasis on mobile phone gaming. Of the nearly 400 games being shown, around ten per cent were on NTT's imode platform, with a considerable portion of the publishing community committing to wireless gaming, including Konami, Enix, Capcom and Taito (which also harbours intentions to enter the European wireless market) among many others. But of equal importance was the attendance of companies from Taiwan, Korea and Hong Kong.

"The two most pronounced trends were the number of foreign Asian companies, and an emphasis on mobile phone gaming"

Gamania's presence was particularly prominent, for example, and NCSoft's extraordinarily handsome *Lineage II* banishes any memories of the slavishly followed *Diablo* template followed by the company's first MMRPG.

But the real significance of the Tokyo Game Show for any western visitor, was once again that it bore testimony to the broad cultural diffusion of videogames in Japan. From the massed ranks of the cosplayers (including Goofy; surely a testament to the globablising power of videogames), to the floor space devoted purely to videogame merchandise, as well as a dedicated kids' area, it's clear that the medium reaches a much broader audience than in Europe or the US. Indeed it's this broad, and unashamedly enthusiastic audience, allied to the self-evident commitment to developing a wide variety of games to appeal to all sections of it, that provide the Japanese videogame industry with such a stable outlook for the future, despite the continuing recession. Perhaps European and US publishers should take note.

Big in Japan

According to figures produced by 'Weekly Famitsu' magazine reflecting hardware sales in Japan for the week ending September 29, Xbox continues to be outsold by PS2, GameCube, PSone and even Bandai's handheld SwanCrystal system. Few stores in Akihabara are currently stocking Xbox software, and fewer still stock actual console units. According to **Edge**'s sources in Japan and a presentation by publishing body CESA to a recent trade mission organised by the British Council, this is due to a number of fairly elementary mistakes.

The most obvious is the size and design of the machine, but more damaging blunders include compiling bug reports in English, requiring a translation process that takes up valuable development time and introduces a potential source of confusion via mistranslation. Perhaps Microsoft's biggest mistake has been to fail to appreciate the nuances of Japanese business culture. Having put a lot of effort into persuading publishers to commit to developing for Xbox, the company simply failed to maintain these business relationships in the way that is expected in Japan – at one point even inadvertently snubbing the head of a major publisher at a recent Tokyo Game Show.

Unfortunately, with prominent Japanese publishers such as Konami openly questioning the viability of the platform in Japan, it's simply not clear whether a solid software line-up and embryonic online service will be enough to revive the company's fortunes in the territory.





As ever, there was a wide range of esoterica, from the *Low Riders* stand (above) to the pneumatic *Murakumo* demo pods (above right), and Takara's Transformers display (right)

Flamenco and Fries

Microsoft's second European Xbox brand experience focuses on the forthcoming Xbox Live roll out



For its second annual Xbox event, Microsoft jetted the European games press, retail representatives and selected publishers to the south of Spain. Taking place the week of September 24 in Seville's Isla Magica theme park, the venue was suitably arranged, with each of the publishers present segregated into individual rooms. In total, some 80 playable titles were available to try out, although nothing that **Edge** hadn't come across at the year's other shows.

Before that could be done, however, Microsoft's Xbox main agents took to the stage to make a series of announcements. Sandy Duncan, Xbox European vice president started off by admitting that mistakes had been made with regards to Xbox in Europe (namely with regards to pricing). It was a welcome moment of humility for Microsoft, although **Edge** would have preferred it if such a realisation had happened before March 14.

Nevertheless, other announcements followed: the Controller S is to finally become available at retail (it should be in stores by the time you read this, priced around £25); Climax's impressive *Sudeki* was unveiled (see p34) while updates of *Gotham Racing 2*, *Splinter Cell*, *Fable* and *BC* were also shown; Ed Fries, Xbox VP of game content, revealed that 178 games would be available by Christmas, with over 300 currently in development.



Microsoft is rapidly learning how to capture a crowd's attention, SCE style. X02 opened with a fireworks and water display (going as far as using water as a projection screen)

Fries went on to confirm the expected Rare buyout (see Ex-box?, p46, for **Edge**'s comment on the deal) before promising footage of *Kameo* running on Xbox hardware was shown. The video revealed a few alterations since the game was last shown at last year's E3, namely the inclusion of health bars above characters' heads and a more angular nature to the visuals (although the game was allegedly ported across in two and a half weeks – see Rare talks). The Twycross developer plans to bring four of Rare's other franchises, including *Perfect Dark 2* to the Microsoft console over the next two years.

From **Edge**'s perspective, the most important announcement was the one regarding Xbox Live. Launching a year after the console (March 14, 2003), the initial service covers the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands and Sweden. The Xbox Live Starter Pack includes the Xbox Communicator headset, a 12-month subscription to Xbox Live and two games (*Whacked!* and *MotoGP*), all for just £40.

Interestingly, when asked about the timescale for the other European nations, Microsoft revealed that it's possible for gamers from certain countries not listed as part of the initial eight to join the Xbox Live experience.

Expect more on Xbox Live in **E**118.

"Ed Fries, Xbox VP of game content, revealed that 178 games would be available by Xmas, with over 300 currently in development"

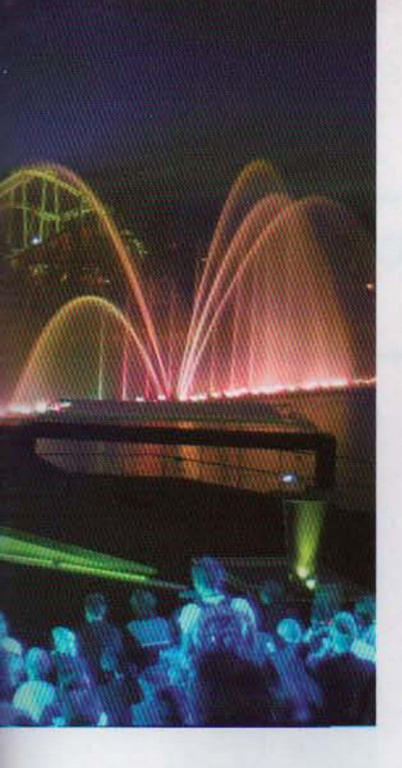








The sizeable Seville venue ensured the crowd never got crowded (although it meant Groove Armada played to about 20 people). Sandy Duncan (far right, top) and J Allard









Ubi Soft's Yves Guillemot took to the stage to exolt *Splinter Cell*'s (top) virtues. Capcom set up three *Steel Batallion* controllers to rightfully wow the crowds to its 'booth'. Edge was rather impressed with the *MotoGP* Xbox Live experience

Rare talks – Chris and Tim Stamper at X02

So how long ago did you start negotiating this deal?
Chris: I think the first contact was made earlier this year. It's something where there obviously was a desire from both parties to put this thing together and it was just a process of time to make sure all the parts fit.

Did you ever consider a floatation?
Chris: Obviously the idea came up but it's not something we really wanted to do. We want to make games, that's what the company is all about. Finding the right partner is the most important criteria and I think we've done that with Microsoft.

What franchises are we likely to see from Rare for the Xbox in the future?
Chris: Well obviously we showed a video of *Kameo*, that'll be one franchise, and a very brief intro of *Perfect Dark* so those two are definitely coming to Xbox. And we have a few surprises back at home as well.

With hindsight, do you feel it's something of a shame that you developed all of that IP and have had to let it go now?
Chris: Well, the two IPs that go back to Nintendo are *Donkey Kong* and *Star Fox* and the rest of the IP that Rare developed actually comes back to Rare. We have a very good relationship with Nintendo, it worked very well with us and it worked out great in the end.

What does Microsoft bring to deal apart from money?
Chris: We wanted a partner with the right vision. Vision and optimism for the future and just listening to what Microsoft has been portraying in the recent meetings it's there – there's a lot of optimism and that is really good to see. We believe in this industry, we've been making games for over 20 years and it's our life. We want someone that actively believes in the future.

Do you see yourselves exploiting Xbox Live in the future?
Chris: Yes, definitely. It's a really important feature of the Xbox platform. It's something that has been well thought out, you can obviously tell that Microsoft has put a lot of thought behind what will make connectivity really work so, yes, we're very excited and do have plans to incorporate that in our future games.

Have you done any work on the online side of things?
Chris: We have some research at the company that we're actively involved with.

What is your research telling you?
Chris: I suppose it tells us it opens up a new door. We're just opening up this door and we don't really know at this stage what we're going to find on the other side but it's a new world and we're really looking forward to exploring it.

Ed: I think we've learned a lot from the acquisitions that we've done. Bungie for example is one that certainly has worked out well but also that we've learned a lot from. You know, we took them and moved them from Chicago to Seattle and then we kind of had to do a lot of work to recreate the environment that they had before and try and make it back to the way they like to work. So going into this deal it was really important to us and to them to really preserve everything as it is, to make sure that we keep the magic the way it is. So we've been able to structure this deal in a very unusual way for Microsoft: to just keep everything the same so that the average employee is going to think, "I still work for Rare."

You've got Lionhead and now Rare. Are you considering opening up a studio in the UK?
Ed: Well, it is nice to have a place here where we have some firstparty development. I mean I have a studio in Japan and several in the US, obviously, so to have a firstparty studio in the UK is a great thing. I will be spending more time here personally, I'm certainly going to be visiting these guys, seeing the products, seeing the games.

What role do the two of you continue to play these days?
Chris: We are actively involved in all of the games that we make. Games are our life, it's what we want to do and I think actually the Microsoft deal will give us more time to devote to that. Myself, I'm still the technical director at Rare, Tim is the creative director and we like to spend as much time as possible getting involved with the games that we're producing.

Obviously this is a huge deal. How much of what Rare is working on now did Microsoft get to see before coming to an agreement?
Ed: We saw everything. They were great to let us come over and meet the teams and see the development. What's really unusual about this deal is that there's so much development that's so far in progress that we can take – the only thing that's assigned to Nintendo is *Star Fox* which just shipped. Everything else is ready to switch over and start to exploit the Xbox. I feel like we get such a running start from this deal as opposed to taking two or three years to start something from scratch to bring it all the way through.

Do you guys still own all of the 8bit stuff and if so can we expect anything from that?
Chris: Yes we do. I suppose there's the *Sabreman* character who's one that you may in the future (laughs).

Are you going to miss anyone at Nintendo?
Chris: It's a good question. I suppose over 15 years we've developed some wonderfully close relationships with people at Nintendo, especially with people at EAD, and yes there are going to be people there that we will miss on a kind of day-to-day communication but they're still our friends and we'll still see them at the shows. And it's not what you may have seen in the press about there being some rift between Nintendo and Rare – that's certainly not the case. I think that's borne out by the fact that we've been able to sort out all of the IP ownership issues. So yes, I feel a tinge of sadness in terms of the people we leave behind but obviously we're very excited about all of the new people that we're meeting at Microsoft and their kind of vision for the future and that really



does excite us. We're really looking forward to it enormously.

Obviously we've heard the official line but what has your experience been so far with regards to development on Xbox?
Chris: It's the best development environment we've ever experienced. The *Kameo* demo that was shown last night took us two and a half weeks to put together. We're just amazed by how easy that was and we just feel now that we can have far more time to actually focus on content. To explore new possibilities rather than just worrying about the underlying technology and everything else that goes along with making great games. So it's the best development environment we've ever experienced.

Were there any games that you wanted to make for Nintendo that you couldn't make but now you can?
Chris: Not really. I mean Rare has always made its own decisions in terms of whatever games we wanted to make. No, I can't think of anything. It's the same going forward – we have a very strong belief in our games and I can see that continuing.

Did you have any reservations/concerns about this deal?
Chris: No, I don't think so. I think the reservations were not being able to find the right partner. That was the biggest concern. Creating a team is a very fragile process – you need the right environment to be able to make great games. So it was more important than anything else to find that right partner and now that we've done that I think you'll see the best games we've ever made will come out in the following years. So we're all very excited.

There was a rumour that you were frustrated about having a smaller audience for your games being on Nintendo platforms?
Chris: No, we've never been concerned about that. We just want to make a great game.

The way you make games is different – not only things like not letting the press in but also the way teams are segregated, almost encouraging competition against each other...
Tim: Yeah, Rare has a different philosophy. We don't have much contact with other game development companies. We try to employ people that are great games players, game enthusiasts and they're really interested to see the other games that are being developed within the company. So it's really a group of game enthusiasts that are working together to produce the best games they can.

Fairplay Campaign kicks up a fuss about pricing

Consumer campaign group urges boycott of videogames at the start of December to persuade publishers to lower videogame prices

A consumer campaign calling for gamers to abstain from buying console games during the first week of December has provoked the outrage of the UK videogame industry. The Fairplay Campaign claims that current pricing structures are both unfair to consumers and financially damaging for the vast majority of publishers. Consequently it hopes that persuading the public to refrain from buying games during one of the most lucrative weeks in the year will force the industry into considering lower price structures for console games.

However, the campaign has not been well received by the industry itself, with a recent issue of trade paper, 'MCV', featuring a near unanimous condemnation of the campaign from publishers and retailers. **Edge** spoke to ELSPA's **Roger Bennett** and **Miles Jacobson** of Sports Interactive to canvass their opinion of the campaign.

The campaign has been organised by several members of the public, as well as a handful of industry insiders. **Stuart Campbell**, a freelance journalist, and former developer, who is assisting the organisers, argues that games should be cheaper not just from a moral standpoint, but because it makes good business sense. "The games industry is currently a failing business – it loses a lot more money than it brings in, and that's despite sales being at an all-time high. The fact is, sales just aren't high enough for more than a tiny handful of games to make their development costs back, and the reason for that is that they're so stupidly, needlessly expensive."

The crux of Fairplay's argument is that cheaper software would generate increased sales of that software, producing enough revenue to meet current development costs. The organisers argue that more people would buy more games, and the cost of meeting this demand would not be significantly higher than under current pricing models, since manufacturing disks is relatively cheap, and marketing costs wouldn't change.

Acting on impulse

"Apart from the hardware manufacturer's fixed licence fees, which are the primary thing FairPlay is setting out to change, there's absolutely no justification for the current price structure. 95 per cent of games lose money so the few that don't, have to make an enormous sum in order to keep the publishers alive. At impulse-buy prices, far more games would make profits, so the burden would be spread. It's a policy choice by publishers, not a necessity, and judging by most of their recent profit and loss figures it's the wrong choice." Indeed the Fairplay Website lists Eidos' recent losses of £30.7 million and the recent layoffs conducted by Infogrames among other examples of the financial difficulties currently plaguing several publishers, and according to TIGA, over 70 developers have gone under already this year.

"The size of the gaming market in terms of people – as opposed to revenue – is still tiny compared to other forms of entertainment, and it's hardly surprising. The cost of development of the average title has multiplied by perhaps a factor of eight over the last five years, and the number of people buying games hasn't increased by anywhere near as much. It's blindingly obvious common sense that you need to grow the market very substantially from its current size, and it's equally blindingly obvious that you'll never do that with games at £40."





Sports Interactive's Miles Jacobson (top) and Roger Bennett of ELSPA aren't convinced by Fairplay's arguments

But according to publishers, it's not obvious at all. 'MCV's survey of publishers, developers and retailers revealed a vitriolic level of opposition to the campaign from those within the industry that are willing to make their voices heard. The sentiments of Argonaut's **Jez San**, who called the campaign "despicable" were fairly typical – though there were some dissenting voices, including Revolution's Charles Cecil and Zed Two's John Pickford. Much of the opposition stemmed from the aggressive tone of the campaign, and the fact that the Website originally used a six-year-old quote by Lionhead's Peter Molyneux (who has since conducted a full interview for the Website about the issue of software pricing).

ELSPA's Roger Bennett replied testily to **Edge**'s request for a comment, "Some of the media within the industry seems to be obsessed with the Fairplay campaign when none other is." For the record, **Edge**'s interest is due to the belief that current pricing structures are an impediment to the massmarket penetration of the medium – whether or not lower pricing is a financially sustainable option. "Of course it would be good for consumers if games can be cheaper," asserts Bennett. "If they object strongly in paying the current price they have to pay for new games, surely they would not buy them, which certainly is not

VIDEOGAMES ARE A RIP OFF

Videogames cost about 40p to produce. Yet they sell for £40. Compared to videogames, replica football shirts are a bargain. Every time you buy a videogame for £40, *you're being taken for an idiot.*

But WHY are games so expensive?
The simple answer is, because no-one's done anything about it. There's absolutely **no inherent reason** why games should cost so much. Games companies charge £40 because that's what they think they can get away with. **We think it's time they stopped getting away with it.**

Who are "we"?
FairPlay is an organisation set up by **consumers and videogames industry professionals** who realise that expensive games are killing the industry, condemning gamers to endless repetition of the same handful of boring, overpriced games, and costing the industry **thousands of jobs**. We propose to put that right by **cutting the price of standard new-release games in half**. This protest is the first step in that campaign. What are we asking you to do? **Nothing.**

A ONE-WEEK VIDEOGAME BOYCOTT

The weeks running up to Christmas are overwhelmingly the games industry's busiest and most lucrative time, accounting for around 80% of the industry's entire annual revenue. If you want to get their attention, this is the time to do it. So we're proposing that for just one week, NOBODY BUYS ANY VIDEOGAMES.

You don't have to disappoint your kids at Christmas. You don't have to give up on that game you've been looking forward to all year. We're not saying "Don't buy a game ever again". All we're saying is, if we all demonstrate our power as consumers by refusing to buy anything in one particular week, the industry will have no choice but to sit up and listen. They've already lost the argument over pricing. But unless we threaten the thing they care about - money - they won't do anything about it.

So let's get their attention.

1st - 8th December 2002
DON'T BUY A VIDEOGAME WEEK

FairPlay
ACTION FOR VIDEOGAME PRICE REDUCTION
www.fairplay-campaign.co.uk

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The Fairplay campaign is urging people to refrain from buying games during the first week of December in a bid to force publishers to lower the price of titles

Photography: Martin Thompson

the case at present." But **Edge**'s concern is that not enough people are willing to pay the current prices.

There are also doubts about whether cheaper prices are commercially viable. "There is no evidence to show that drastically reducing prices for new releases will increase sales sufficiently to generate the profit necessary to maintain the required levels of investment in developing new product," continues Bennett.

Miles Jacobson, from Sports Interactive, is equally sceptical about the capacity of lower prices to increase software sales. "If you look at the campaign's business model, game sales would need to more than double to make the same money back, and there is no proof whatsoever that this would happen. I don't believe it would do." He goes on to argue that even if games were cheaper, gamers wouldn't have time to play any more than they currently do. "If I buy a game, which I do, regularly, I want to be able to play it for weeks solidly. That means less time to play other games." And, he argues, a variable licensing fee is not really an option. "Without the current licensing charges, consoles would be over £500 at launch, and seeing as they struggle to sell at £299.99, a higher price point makes it even more of a luxury item."

The fundamental stumbling block that the campaign faces is the fact that lower prices will require every part of the supply chain – publishers, console manufacturers, distributors and retailers – to risk the possibility of lower revenues in the hope of increased sales. Currently every part of the supply chain seems content with the status quo, in which the industry is only profitable during cyclical upswings, when installed bases are large, necessitating higher prices to offset the low cashflows of transitional years. Still, it would be interesting to consider the impact of universally lower videogame prices on this cyclical structure. PSone has continued to generate considerable hardware and software sales despite the introduction of newer hardware, and it's worth noting that software on the platform is significantly cheaper than that of newer platforms.

Equally, while publishers would argue that cheaper prices aren't sustainable while the increase in development costs outstrips the increase in the audience for videogames, Fairplay's point is that the market would increase in size were it not for a prohibitive pricing structure.

Ultimately, expecting the videogame industry to voluntarily risk lowering videogame prices in the hope of a meaningful increase in sales is probably futile. But the campaign isn't targeting the industry, it's targeting consumers, who may be able to force the issue – as this issue goes to press, the campaign's Website is reaching an average of 63,000 new users a week. While **Edge** doesn't endorse the campaign you can read its arguments for yourself at www.fairplay-campaign.co.uk and make up your own mind. All **Edge** would like to see is a reasoned debate about current pricing structures, and some research into the viability of lower prices.

In fact, our opinion hasn't changed much since **E**100: "It is clear that the videogame industry needs to be more willing to discuss the implications of pricing strategies if it is to broaden the videogaming demographic, determine the relationship between pricing and piracy, and really rival the music and film industries in terms of cultural impact."

"It's a policy choice by publishers, not a necessity, and judging by most of their recent profit and loss figures it's the wrong choice"

CUTTINGS



Super Mario shines at retail

After getting off to a relatively muted start in Japan, the European launch of *Super Mario Sunshine* (reviewed in **E**114) has been a considerable success, with over 175,000 units selling across Europe during the game's first weekend on sale. This means that nearly one in five of the million European GameCube owners owns a copy of the game, while Nintendo claims that sales of the console grew by 40 per cent across Europe in response to the launch.

As **Edge** goes to press, more good news for Nintendo is that *Star Fox Adventures* (see p90) is currently sitting atop the Japanese sales charts, having sold over 160,000 units in just a couple of weeks after its launch.

Commandos creator sets up startup

The creator of the *Commandos* series, Gonzo Suarez, has left Spanish developer, Pyro Studios, to start a new development company called Arvirago Entertainment. He'll be joined by the lead developer on the *Commandos* series, Jon Beltran de Heredia and nine other former Pyro employees. *Commandos 2* sold 500,000 copies within a week of its release on Xbox and PlayStation2, while the overall series has sold over 3m copies so far. The new startup's first project is already underway, codenamed 'The Lord of the Creatures'.

alienbrain gets upgrade

NXN has launched alienbrain 6.0, a new version of its asset management package which combines asset management and software configuration management in a single system, allowing coders and artists to use a single central framework for the management of source code and graphics data. The package also features optimised interfaces and various other tweaks to improve efficiency, and comes bundled with a version of the visual file comparison software, Araxis Merge Professional. The new version is available for a range of prices starting at $690 (£447). For more information, contact NXN at infoUK@nxn-software.com

JAMMA stays stuck in a rut

This year's coin-op trade show sees Sega continue to dominate the sector, but little cheer for a beleaguered industry

Compared to the AOU show at the start of every year, JAMMA is, traditionally, relatively rich in the range of new coin-op titles on show and the number of announcements made, so expectations were high for this year's exhibition, which took place at the Tokyo Big Sight exhibition Centre from September 19–21. In particular, hopes were high that Sega would be demonstrating new software on the Xbox-based Chihiro board and new hardware in the shape of the hotly anticipated Naomi3 board – especially since lately the company seems almost single-handedly responsible for the fate of the flagging arcade industry. Sadly, though, such hopes proved misplaced and JAMMA itself continued to reflect the sorry state of the sector.



Yes, Sega was the main focus of attention and, yes, Chihiro was dutifully on display, but the show itself was somewhat anaemic, and most companies seemed content simply to ape the sorts of data card and network-based titles with which Sega has had so much success this year. Disappointingly though, not many were successful in matching Sega's titles in terms of quality. Namco's *Dragon Chronicle*, for example (see Out There, **E**116), did demonstrate some potential, but ultimately didn't stand up to scrutiny, and though Konami demonstrated several titles compatible with network play and card-based data storage, few were worth playing. *Winning Eleven Arcade* did attract considerable interest, but the complicated commands and simulation-flavoured gameplay appear unsuitable for the demands of arcade attention spans.

Arcade swansong

Other big-name publishers proved few and far between. Capcom was present, but significantly only to usher in its arcade swansong in the shape of *Capcom Fighting All Stars* (see **E**116), a title sadly blighted by sluggish pacing that did little to distinguish itself from the manifold 3D beat 'em ups already available. Indeed in general there were few titles on display that distinguished themselves – a clear sign of a widespread reluctance to invest heavily in the sector.

Even Sega offered little to cheer. Poor screen technology let down the visuals of *The House of the Dead III*, the first title to run on the new Chihiro board (which interestingly uses GD-Roms for storage, despite its Xbox architecture), while *OutRun 2* and *Virtua Cop 3* weren't even being shown. Nor was Amusement Vision's TriForce title, *F-Zero*, and Naomi3 hardware was also absent, suggesting that Sega isn't willing to show off the new technology until it has a major title, such as *Virtua Fighter 5*, to demonstrate its capacity.





Sega unveiled the shape of its new hardware – the GameCube-based TriForce and the Xbox-based Chihiro

The only other trends of note at the show were for mah-jong and darts games – again thanks to Sega's lead over the past year (Hitmaker recently went as far as opening a darts bar in Tokyo's fashionable Shibuya district) and bingo games offering prizes for players.

So this year's JAMMA was a disappointment. More significantly, Sega's product line-up was a disappointment, with few new titles and little that genuinely impressed. And when Sega catches a cold, the whole arcade industry starts feeling ill. Still, next year's AOU show should be a bit more interesting, with the likes of *OutRun 2* and *Sega Rally 3* expected to make an appearance. But the long-term problem of publisher indifference persists, and it's unlikely to resolved in the near future.



The Japanese coin-op sector continues to underwhelm, with a proliferation of uninspiring titles and few new ideas as to how new punters will be lured back into the arcades. Even Sega had a bit of an off show, with little that genuinely impressed



BAFTA announces Interactive Award winners

Ian Livingstone scoops the Special Award at the fifth annual Interactive Entertainment Awards

The fifth annual BAFTA Interactive Entertainment Awards, presented this year by television's Adam (Buxton) and Joe (Cornish), saw Eidos managing director, Ian Livingstone, win a prestigious Special Award in acknowledgment of his particular contribution to the UK videogame industry. The awards ceremony took place on October 10 at London's Le Meridien Grosvenor House and also contained some cheer for both Microsoft and Nintendo, with each picking up awards.

Livingstone's award was recognition of a career that spans the introduction of a whole generation to the world of games with the co-authored 'Fighting Fantasy' series of gamebooks, the creation of the lucrative *Tomb Raider* franchise, and more recently the likes of *Beach Life*.



Consolation prizes

Elsewhere, though, the two companies fighting it out for second place in the console market, also received some recognition, with Microsoft's *Halo* awarded two BAFTAs, for Best Multiplayer Game and Best Console Game, and Nintendo's *Pikmin* awarded the Interactivity BAFTA. Still, while Sony didn't have much to shout about at the awards ceremony, it will no doubt be consoling itself with the fact that it recently shipped the 40 millionth PlayStation2, confirming its substantial dominance of the sector.

Other game-related awards went to BioWare's *Neverwinter Nights* for Best PC Game, *Grand Prix 4* for Best Sports Game, and *SMS Chess* for the Best Mobile Game, but the BAFTA Interactive Entertainment Awards aren't just about games. The near 600 guests that attended the awards, also saw awards go to the likes of The Tate Modern, Pathé Distribution for the 'Memento' DVD, and the Habitat Website.





***Halo*, *Neverwinter Nights* and *Pikmin* were all award winners at the BAFTA Interactive Entertainment Awards, held in London recently**

CUTTINGS



Edge is hiring

Edge is looking for a talented writer to join its team of experienced videogame journalists in Bath. The successful candidate will be expected to demonstrate the ability to write scintillating copy to a high standard for every part of the magazine, from Front End to Testscreen.

If you have an in-depth knowledge and passion for gaming, an appetite for learning, and an ability to work within a fast-moving environment under pressure, then you could be the right person for the position. Some experience and strong industry contacts would be a bonus, but enthusiasm, drive and commitment are essential.

Applicants should send samples of their work (including a 500-word critique of **Edge**), along with a full CV and covering letter, quoting REF 627, to:

Human Resources Department,
Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street,
Bath, BA1 2BW
Email: recruit@futurenet.co.uk

US Retailers refuse to stock BMX XXX

The new direction taken by Acclaim's marketing department appears to have backfired in the US, with three major retail chains refusing to stock *BMX XXX*. Wal-Mart, Kay-Bee Toys and Toys R Us have all said that they will not distribute the title, citing the game's inappropriate content. Acclaim CEO, **Greg Fischbach**, has responded to criticism of the content of its *BMX XXX* game, arguing that "there is a general, unfair characterisation of the interactive entertainment industry and as a result, our product is being held to an entirely different standard than other entertainment media with comparable content, including movies, television and radio." Nevertheless, his claim that the title "was not designed for, nor is it being marketed to, consumers under the age of 17," strikes **Edge** as a little bit disingenuous, since this is clearly the demographic that will be most impressed by the title's combination of titillation and extreme sports. No UK retailers have so far announced any similar reluctance to stock the title.

Recently Reviewed

Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
TimeSplitters2	PS2, GC, Xbox	Eidos Interactive	Free Radical Design	9
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	PS2	Acclaim	Criterion	8
Ikaruga	DC, GC	ESP	Treasure	8
Rocky	Xbox, GC, PS2, GBA	Rage	In-house	8
Super Monkey Ball 2	GC	Sega	Amusement Vision	8
Battlefield 1942	PC	Infogrames	Epic/Digital Illusions	7
Quantum Redshift	Xbox	Microsoft	Curly Monsters	7
Sega GT	Xbox	Sega	Wow Entertainment	7
The Thing	PC, Xbox, PS2	Vivendi Universal	Computer Artworks	7
Marvel vs Capcom 2	Xbox, PS2	Capcom	In-house	6
Petit Copter	Xbox	Aqua System	In-house	6
Shox	PS2	EA	In-house	6
Way of the Samurai	PS2	Eidos Interactive	Acquire	6
Auto Modellista	PS2	Capcom	In-house	4



TimeSplitters2



Burnout 2: Point of Impact



Ikaruga



Rocky

Seeing is believing

Finnish visualisation specialist Hybrid is improving the quality of online games thanks to its clever occlusion technology

Visualising EverQuest II

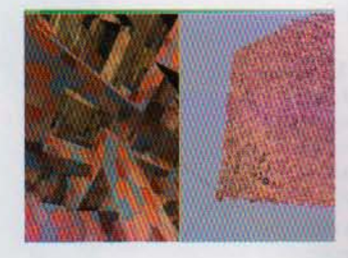
"We stumbled across dPVS while trying to figure out how we were going to make our outdoor scenes fast," says **Jonathon Davis**, lead programmer on *EverQuest II* at Sony Online Entertainment. "The demos we downloaded blew us away and we were able to get it running well enough to demonstrate its viability as our culling and occlusion solution within a couple of days."

Previous to this, the team had built a portal-based rendering system for indoor dungeons and building interiors and was starting work on an outdoor terrain engine. Using dPVS meant it could move to a unified engine architecture without special distinction between outdoor and indoor areas, as well as getting improved speed.

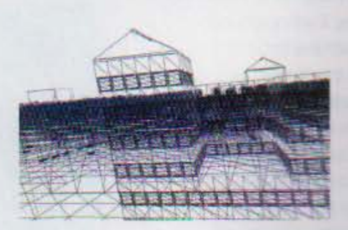
"In heavily occluded scenes such as a densely populated dungeon, our performance increase approaches 400 per cent," Davis says. "Even in wide open outdoor areas there is usually enough occluded geometry at our draw distances to net us anywhere from a 50 to 200 per cent speedup." And, as he explains, this in turn is feeding back into the richness of the game's graphical look. "Mostly we are using the extra flexibility to allow the artists to focus on art instead of nitpicking every little polygon they add."

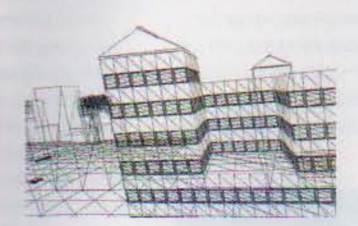
If there's one genre the industry hopes will prove increasingly lucrative it has to be Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs). The four big examples, *EverQuest*, *Ultima Online*, *Dark Ages of Camelot* and *Asheron's Call* have over a million subscribers (though Microsoft refuses to release figures for *Asheron's Call*). And there's still *EverQuest II*, *Asheron's Call 2*, *Star Wars Galaxies*, *PlanetSide*, *The Sims Online* and *The Matrix Online* to come. Meanwhile, Finnish graphics company Hybrid is already well on the way to cornering its own small part of this huge market.

Originally setting out to offer developers a PC game engine called SurRender, Hybrid made a bigger splash with its Umbra technology, also known by the acronym dPVS. Dynamic Potentially Visible Set sounds complex but like the range of tinned wood sealants from the archetypal UK DIY company, it does exactly what it says.









The huge difference in the number of polygons drawn onscreen when Hybrid's dPVS is used to remove objects which can not be seen is clear in the above images

Out of sight

Dynamically, that is on a per-frame basis, the technology works out what parts of the computer generated game scene are potentially visible from the player's camera position. What can be seen is drawn on the screen, but objects and parts of objects hidden behind walls or obscured by other objects aren't. This means the game system's graphics card (dPVS works on PC and consoles), is handling fewer polygons per frame, and so can run at a faster framerate or the detail of the scene can be improved.

"The process occurs before any precious graphics bandwidth or fillrate is spent," explains Hybrid's chief evangelist **Jouni Mannonen**. "It's a balancing technology that uses 15 per cent of the CPU's resources to provide a massive performance gain."

While this is good news for developers, it's particularly welcome for developers of MMOGs because they have to send scene information over a network connection. Using dPVS means less information over the Internet, and that reduces the latency of the game. "Using dPVS translates to massively increased speeds in complex worlds," says Mannonen. "The general improvement in MMOGs can range from two to ten times depending on the scene." Unsurprisingly Hybrid's client list reads like a who's who of MMOG development. Sony Online use it for the *EverQuest* upgrade *Shadows of Luclin*, and is using it for *EverQuest II* and *Star Wars Galaxies*. The new, as yet unnamed, Richard Garriott game is onboard too as are Artifact's *Horizons*, MindArk's *Project Entropia* and Mythic's *Dark Ages of Camelot*.

As well as performance increases, using the technology has other positive side effects. One of the classic *Quake* hacks is to run the game in wireframe mode so it's possible to see the positions of other players through the walls. "Because what is not seen isn't submitted to the graphics card for rendering, dPVS stops cheats seeing behind walls," Mannonen reveals. "But it doesn't stop maphack-style cheats where the player runs a hacked client," he warns. "For this we need to get the server to send each player updates only for the other players they can see. That's where we're going next."









Sony Online Entertainment is just one of the companies currently relying on Hybrid's technology to ensure that its MMOGs look and play as well as possible. The first title to use dPVS was *EverQuest: Shadows of Luclin*, and it will also be used in the forthcoming *Star Wars Galaxies* and *EverQuest II*. The software can also be used to prevent online cheating in a game of *Quake*

www.g-cluster.com

Making the right connection

It's been involved in mobile phones and Wi-Fi but now G-cluster is focusing its thin-client game processing technology on the cable TV market

As a games technology company G-cluster is only two-years-old but already it's hoping to be third time lucky. Not only in terms of **Edge** coverage (it has previously made appearances in **E**90 and **E**101) but in terms of finding its target market.

Originally buoyed and let down by the potential of mobile telephony and the bursting 3G licence bubble of 2000, the next opportunity which came along was the Wi-Fi caper of 2001. This found G-cluster in talks with MobileStar, a US concern which went bankrupt attempting to deploy a wireless broadband network in 550 Starbucks coffeeshops. Strike two.

"Under the hood, nothing much has changed with our technology," says **Thomas Schmidt**, the company's VP of strategy and development, of the G-cluster system, which consists of a cluster of 'bog standard' PCs working together to run games. The concept is itself a simple one: distributed processing. Using the power of the clustered PCs, which are controlled by a central scheduler, each frame of a game is sent over a broadband network as an MPEG stream of graphics and sound to be decoded by an output device, whether it be mobile phone, PDA or set-top box. "Two years ago the market was mobile phones but there's not been any u-turn in what we are trying to do. Ours is a revolutionary idea and it takes time to find the right partners and market to the right people," Schmidt explains.

G-cluster's last stand

Which brings us to the tail end of 2002 and a new market. This time G-cluster's focus is cable TV, specifically the burgeoning video on demand sector. "The basis problem with running games on set-top boxes, is they don't have enough local processing and there are dozens of different boxes you have to port your games to," Schmidt explains. "It's a quality assurance nightmare." What set-top boxes are good at, however, is decoding video and stereo sound streams at 25fps and outputting them to a TV screen. This makes them ideal for G-cluster's thin-client technology. Run any game on the main cluster and just send each frame to a set-top box to output, while receiving the player's button inputs back via TCP/IP. "The latency of the return loop for the player's input is below 100m/s, it's hardly noticeable," says Schmidt, while playing a smooth game of *Quake II* via a nondescript small black box on top of a TV.

Other demos G-cluster has available include Linux favourite *Lux Racer*, as well as current BSkyB moneypot *Worms*. "We've been talking to some senior publishers, as well as independent developers about getting game content. By Christmas we expect to be able to offer cable companies a portfolio of between 20 and 30 games," Schmidt claims, although he adds that he doesn't see this as a long-term role for G-cluster. "We're a technology company. In the future, I don't expect Time Warner Cable to be phoning me up and asking for games from EA," he laughs.

Distribution deal

At this stage at least, the signs for G-cluster are looking good. It's signed a distribution deal with Thirdspace, a developer and integrator of video server systems and client software set up by Oracle and Alcatel. It's involved with ongoing user trials in Finland and Spain and two Swedish trials are also expected to start in early 2003. And despite the disappointments of the past, Schmidt doesn't even out the possibility G-cluster might make another go of the wireless space. "It's not something we have lost sight of," he says. "We have a proof of concept deployment over UMTS [Universal Mobile Telecommunications System]. We're waiting on someone to deploy a network that can stream video at the right bandwidth and with the right latency."









The most powerful set-top boxes at present can just about handle the graphical complexity of games such as *Worms*. Using G-cluster's technology, however, cable network operators will have the potential to push high-end content such as *Doom III* as all the processing occurs on the server, not locally on the set-top box. G-cluster is currently trialling its system in a couple of countries with games such as *Quake* and *Quake II*



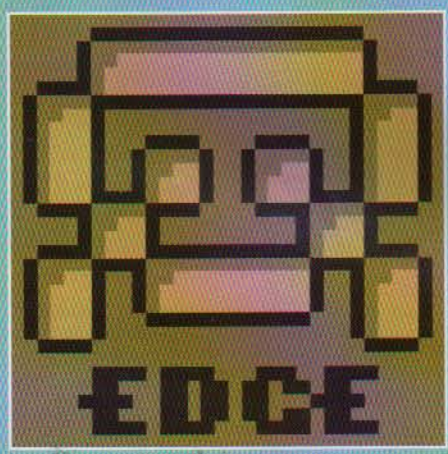


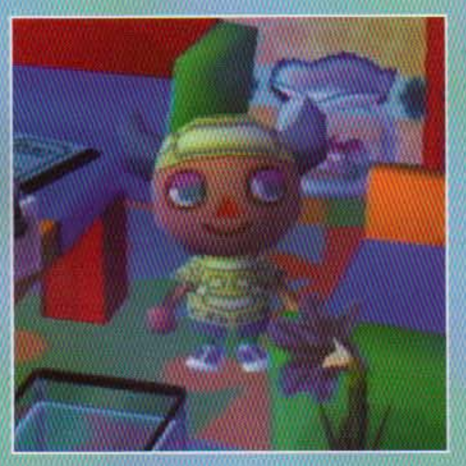
Through the round window: At G-cluster's HQ in Helsinki, Finland; it's hoping that the video-on-demand market will prove to be more stable for its game technology than the 3G or Wi-Fi markets have proved to be

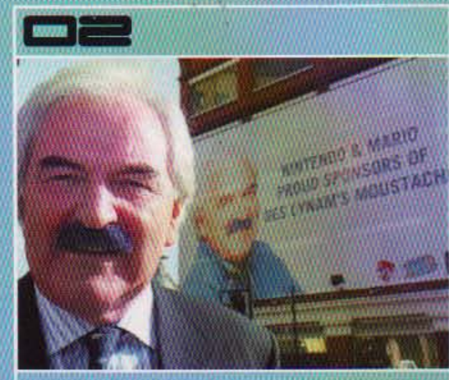
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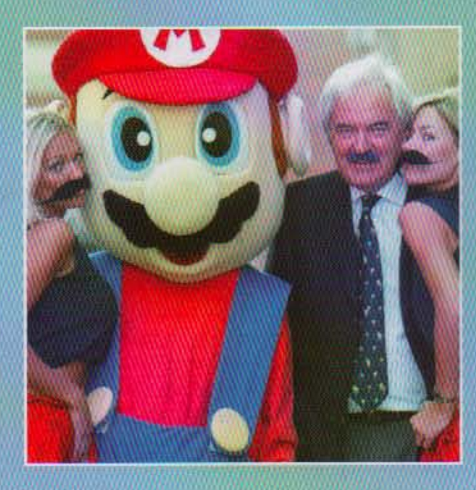








Des Lynam: dying for *Mario Sunshine*. Nintendo's sponsorship money should cover bleaching costs



01 Animal attraction

UK: *Animal Crossing* might promote the simple life, but **Edge** isn't finding it easy being the best looking kid in town. Imagine: posh puppy Portia's always bitching about the state of your house, arch fashionistas Able and Mable reckon you'd look only good in tie-dye, and the other day Hopper said it looked like **Edge** had been eating too much. Must be all those peaches, **Edge** supposes, but being a plus size just makes the right threads even harder to find. So **Edge** turns to its forum, running a hastily-conceived competition to design the best 32 x 32 16-colour texture for use on its tiny wardrobeless avatar. Many high-quality entries ensued, but forumite Totoro emerges as the winner, with his beige 'Invader' design. Those wishing to follow in **Edge**'s fashion footsteps can see all the entries at http://forum.edge-online.co.uk

02 'Tache of the day

UK: "So, team, we need a way of launching Nintendo's most anticipated game in over five years. Any suggestions? Fine, let's get out the whiteboard, brainstorm a while. Now, think Mario. What does he say to you. It's-a-me? What? C'mon guys, let's run with this. Italian… good… short, fat… DeVito? No chance, remember Hoskins? What else? Moustache. Moustache! Okay, good! Now, who has a moustache? Selleck was great in 'Magnum PI', but… not quite right. Got it! Lynam! Perfect. Give him a ludicrous amount of money, we'll dye his moustache purple, and the press'll come running. Take that, Acclaim!"

Soundbytes

"And here we go into the first action scene which is the first full-on introduction of Blade which I wanted to do a little bit like a Doom videogame – these corridors are straight out of Doom."
Blade II director Guillermo del Toro describes the aesthetic influence for one of the film's early sequences.

"I've killed Peter Molyneux."
Having lost sight of the *Populous* creator in the early hours of the morning at X02, a jovial J Allard fears the worst.

"I'm pleased that the true worth of my moustache has finally been realised. It's something I've worn proudly for years, despite what fashions have come and gone. I consider Mario a long-serving brother in arms, and long may we both wear our fine facial hair with pride."
A mauve-moustached Des Lynam closes his eyes and thinks of the money.

"Xbox™, the videogame system from Microsoft, is on the search for the ultimate student gamer and is offering a grand prize of £10,000 for the student who can beat off all opposition to claim the title."
An Xbox press release. "Beat off". Huhhuh. Huhhuhhuh…

03 'Thirty Minutes, Boring'

UK: Are videogames art? They are if you're Ryan Gander, a British artist who produces screen prints composed from text taken from popular videogames. Described by britart.com as "a metaphorical hall of mirrors for the viewer," Gander's transcriptions may look like a single-sheet tips book to philistines, but titles such 'Three Hundred and Eighty Seven Hours of Labour (Taken from James Bond 007)' should mean even art-illiterate **Edge** readers can identify with his craft. **Edge**'s favourite, incidentally, is 2001's 'Thirty Minutes, Boring (Taken from Tomb Raider – Lara Croft)'. Each of the 47" x 37" pieces is part of a limited run of 15, and costs £180 from www.britart.com

04 Coffee and TV

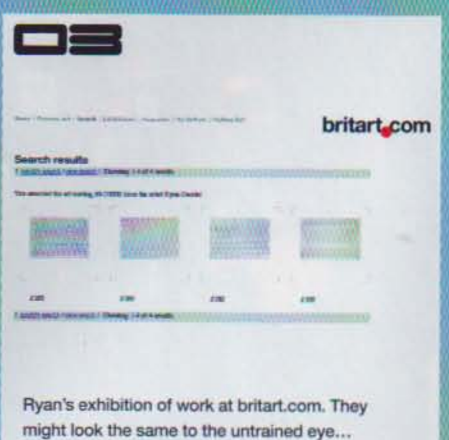
Japan: They're not giving up yet, and what better way to fight overwhelming public apathy towards the Xbox than by pumping disinterested punters full of caffeine? Just opened in Marubiru building, Microsoft's Xbox Café promotes "the Xbox lifestyle" with *Age of Empires*, *Dungeon Siege*, and lots of coffee. Plasma TVs and 5.1 surround sound courtesy of Pioneer enhance the sumptious relaxation, as does supercool furniture supplied by The Conran Shop. And if that isn't enough to persuade J-gamers to buy into Bill's dream, according to a lazy Internet translation of its Japanese promotional site, it's "the world where the Xbox is new bodily sensation." A bit like herpes, then. The Xbox Café can be found on the ground floor of Tokyo's Maribiru centre, and opens daily from 11am–9pm.

05 Dual-mock too

Japan: Laughing at the GameCube PSO keyboard/pad combination's totally passé these days, of course – honestly, it's so last year it's like mocking the size of the Xbox – but it turns out there's still mileage in the medium. Sammy, purveyors of Pachinko and *those* ridiculous Guilty Gear fatalities, have come up with a DualShock2 keyboard for *Final Fantasy* addicts who want peripheral convergence. **Edge**'s Japanese spies claim the device is heavy and unwieldy, though, so the magazine has to advise caution. And moderation, Lupin; you'll sprain your wrist if you do it too much.

Data Stream

Britain's fourth favourite toy in 1977:	**PlayDoh Barber Shop**
PS2 sales across North America in August:	**454,000**
Game Boy Advance sales across North America in August:	**158,000**
Xbox sales across North America in August:	**137,000**
GameCube sales across North America in August:	**128,000**
Britain's third favourite toy in 1977:	**'Star Wars' figures and vehicles**
Number of copies of *Mario Sunshine* sold across Europe:	**175,000**
Percentage increase on GameCube hardware sales:	**40**
Britain's second favourite toy:	**Chad Valley Huggy Bear Soft Toys**
Accumulated shipment of *Final Fantasy* titles in Japan:	**23,980,000**
Accumulated shipment of *Dragon Quest* titles in Japan:	**30,000,000**
Britain's favourite toy in 1977:	**Britain's Combine Harvester**



Ryan's exhibition of work at britart.com. They might look the same to the untrained eye…



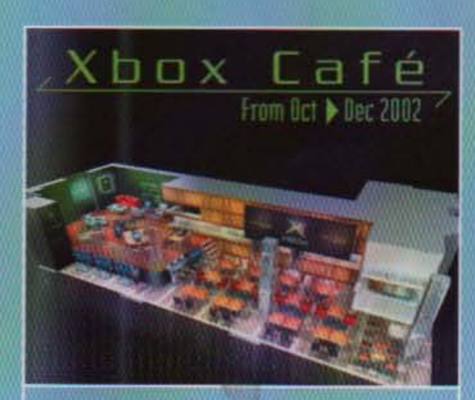
… but the textual difference between this, 'A Long Weekend (Taken from Resident Evil: Survivor)'…



… and this – Ryan's 'Medal of Honour' (sic) piece – is phenomenal. A bargain at £180, says Edge



Britart.com. Go there and do a search for Daniel Gray. He's an Edge reader, he is. Cultured lot, you



Will sweet desserts tempt gamers towards the Xbox, or will the coffee have a Sega swirl?



The Maribu Centre, right at the core of Microsoft's new revolution of console/snack food domination



Westerners who want to visit may be dismayed to find hitherto unmentioned region protection



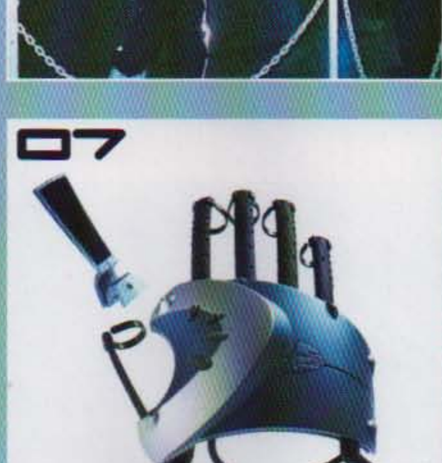
Bastard peripheral: the product of an illicit romance between a DualShock and a Spectrum

06 Beat dis

Japan: Even competing with the rather eccentric displays at the Tokyo Game Show, Konami's presentation stood out. Quite apart from the live demonstration of *MGS2 Substance* by Hideo Kojima and the frankly odd inclusion of professional speed eating, one of the company's many highlights was the live *Martial Beat 2* exhibit. Like its predecessor, the game features sensors that are strapped to a player's arms and legs, and gameplay that's a cross between a street fight, a Jane Fonda workout, *Para Para Paradise*, and *Dance Dance Revolution*. And to show the game off, the company chose two real-life martial arts experts who actually hit each other. To the tune of Geri Halliwell's 'It's Raining Men'.



Martial Beat. Next up, the sullen *ShoeGazingMania 2002*, and *Mosh-a-Rama* with peripheral piercings





07 Smell the glove

US: Futurists predict that we'll eventually be multi-tasking with our digital chums by using the power of the mind alone. But in the meantime we'll just have to make do with a hand job. The Essential Reality P5 glove is the latest device that promises to deliver a more sensual game experience. It uses the company's own mysterious 'bend sensor and tracking technologies' and though it can operate with a standard 'mouse mode' out of the box, its true power is fully realized when used in concert with games that have been especially enabled for it, such as *Beachhead 2002* and *Hitman 2*. But at $150 (£97), will it become another Nintendo Power Glove? Go to www.essentialreality.com if you want to learn more.

The new Powerglove? And if so, does this mean a sequel to The Wizard is on the way? **Edge** hopes so

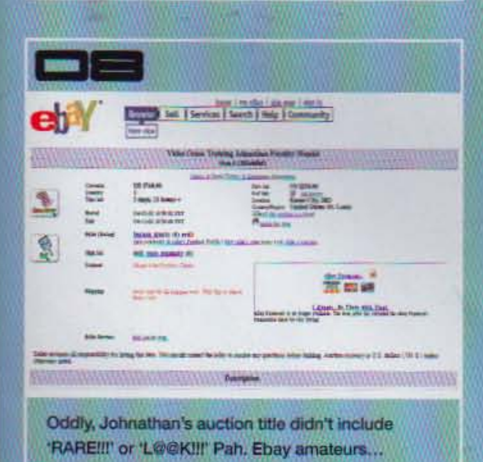




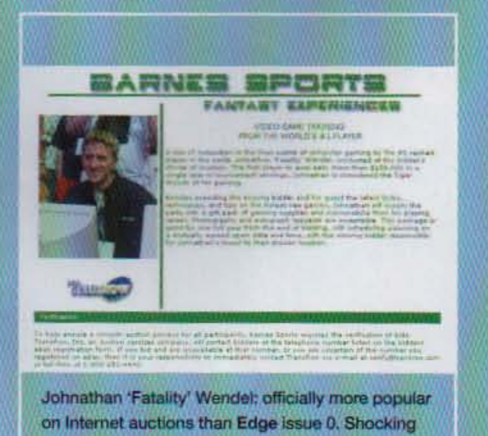
Seriously, call Fred Savage and get this made. It's more than a game – it's the chance of a lifetime

08 Quake player to leave house

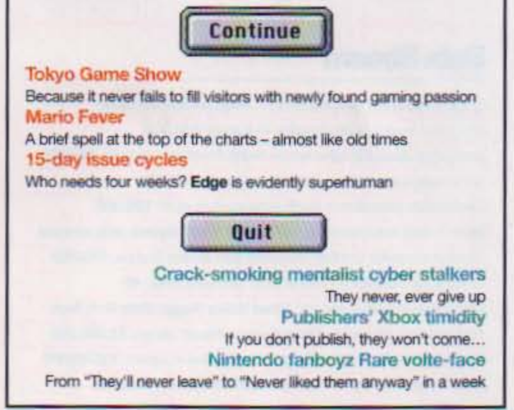
US: So the Christmas lights go up on Oxford St, and the virtual world lights up simultaneously with online bargains for eagle-eyed Internet shoppers. This particular peculiarity's from eBay, where seller 'barnes_sports' lists its product as, "A day of instruction in the finer points of computer gaming by the #1 ranked player in the world, Johnathan 'Fatality' Wendel." Apparently, "Photographs and autograph requests are acceptable," which may have had a factor in pushing the bid up to, at the time of writing, $750 (£486). There are still three days left to go, though, and not long after that until Christmas. The date of the event is left to the discretion of the winning bidder, but will the ideal geek-mom transport and wrap Wendel in time for December 25? Only time will tell.



Oddly, Johnathan's auction title didn't include 'RARE!!!' or 'L@@K!!!' Pah. Ebay amateurs...



Johnathan 'Fatality' Wendel: officially more popular on Internet auctions than **Edge** issue 0. Shocking





09 Tales from Earthsea

Initially, 'Tales From Earthsea' may seem a strange first taster for Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea world. Five previous books make up the meat of the series, while this anthology of chronologically disparate tales acts as an Earthsea equivalent of a mini-'Simarillion' to Tolkien's Middle-earth. Indeed, in her foreword, the author suggests the book is not a good starting point, yet the five stories here provide a varied and enjoyable introduction to the newcomer, as much as the seasoned traveller.

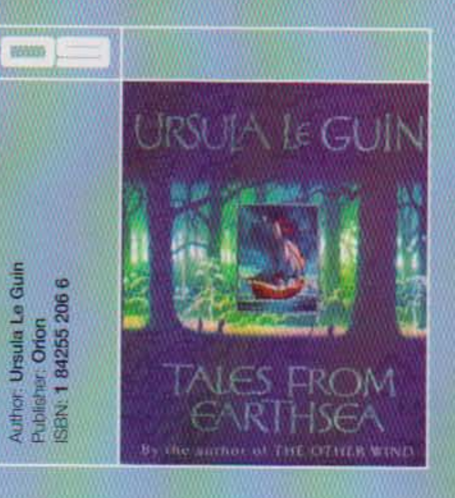
The first and longest story, 'The Finder', in particular, sets the scene describing the working of the magic and lore of the Earthsea universe. More concerning the scope and internecine dealings of wizards are explained in 'The Bones of the Earth' and 'On the High Marsh'. Fans of cartography will also enjoy referring events of the book back to the Earthsea map Le Guin reproduces. The final tale, 'Dragonfly', sets these historic lessons in stark contrast, however. For unlike Tolkien's Middle-earth, with its obvious masculine, donnish and epic overtones, Le Guin's focus for Earthsea is underpinned by a delicate conflict between the sexes, which in 'Dragonfly', literally becomes a battle between high magic (male) and low magic (female). Closure, of sorts, is gained meanwhile, in the lovers' dance of Darkrose and Diamond. And in the end, it's this more gentle and thoughtful approach which sets the series apart from much of the fantasy mush that has followed in Tolkien's wake.

10 After the Quake

Best known for his 1987 novel 'Norwegian Wood', the success of which drove him to leave Japan, Haruki Murakami's recent work has been characterised by the gaze of the outsider. That, and its quality, makes it an ideal entry point for those interested in the intricacies of Japanese culture. First came the documentary 'The Tokyo Gas Attack and the Japanese Psyche', which investigated the Sarin attacks on the Tokyo underground and the reasons behind it. 'After the Quake' continues the approach, albeit in fictional form, taking the Kobe earthquake as its focus.

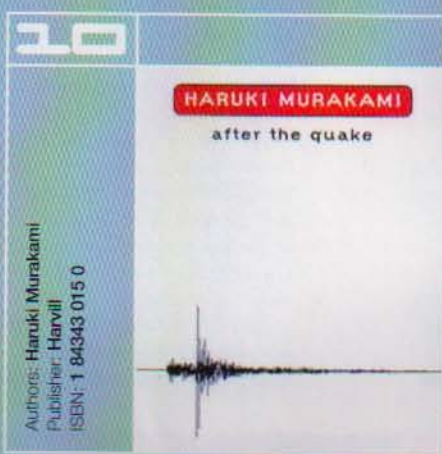
The result is six short stories chronicling the long-range effects of the earthquake on those over who, at first glance, it should have little power. In parts whimsical and yet in others literary, 'After The Quake' makes a subtle read. For, despite the power of the main event, never described, Murakami's aim seems to be a delicate dissection of Japanese culture as he finds it in the late-'90s. The cast of characters, bachelor salarymen through young students and 50-something emigrants, have their lives torn apart and occasionally put back together again as seismic waves bounce around the substrata of their country's zeitgeist. Yet unlike 'The Tokyo Gas Attack', which asked big questions of the way Japanese society is ordered, this time Murakami seems more content to leave question marks hanging in the air. As benefits the fictional form, these lives examined are less corporal but perhaps all the more powerful for that.

09



Author: Ursula Le Guin
Publisher: Orion
ISBN: 1 84255 206 6

10



Authors: Haruki Murakami
Publisher: Harvill
ISBN: 1 84343 015 0

11



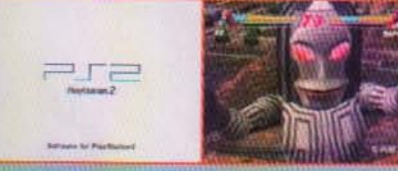
Site: **Uncle Clive**
URL: **http://www.uncleclive.co.uk**

11 Website of the month

The creation of a regular contributor to the **Edge** forum, Uncle Clive's slogan is "Gaming has lost its village idiots." Those familiar with Acclaim's recent publicity stunts might disagree, but they'll be placated by the site's numerous attacks on said marketing monkeys, intrigued by the decade-old *Mario Sunshine* merchandise, and amused by the equation that reveals "An absolute mathematical certainty" regarding the Xbox Live Communicator. The funniest videogame site on the Net? **Edge** isn't giving up a soundbite for the front page that easily, but... maybe.

12 Advertainment

Japan: The advert for the latest *Ultraman* game from Bandai depicts two main characters having their version of a domestic. At least that's **Edge**'s interpretation of the events...



Logo appears. "Darling, I adoooooooore you," says our female giant scary Ultrawoman type lady.



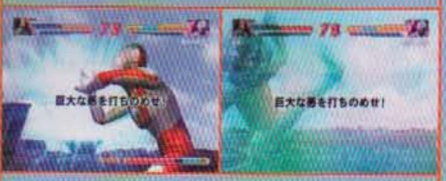
"Christ, stop it already!" orders ultracool Ultraman. "No, no, I really, *really* do," she insists.



"Jesus, leave me alone, will you?" says ultrafighter Ultraman. And before he knows it, he's under attack.



Not one to not hit the ladies, Ultraman fights back. Stunned momentarily at being countered...



... crazy lady charges up. "Right, take this then!" she says as she unleashes her special neurotic attack...



... and is still laughing maniacally as ultrasmooth Ultraman bounces her neuroticism right back at her.



You can barely hear psycho lady scream once the voiceover kicks in: "*Ultraman Fighting Evolution 2*!"



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Gamers: you've never had it so good

Dilated with pleasure, RedEye's dark eyes are illuminated by a flash of white. The room shakes with bass and shivers thrill down his spine. We are lucky, non-euphoric, whiny fools. Final form, 100 per cent analysed, everything down.

Earlier. Concentrate. The rain on the dirty glass roof of the station platform hammers white noise. Beneath it, the platform sounds are as diverse as they are irritating. Faithless and shattered, RedEye quickens his pace, puts his head down, coat up. Phones bleep, babies shriek, teens kiss, trains chug gas and scream and, God, the headache. Chewing gum sticks to his shoe. Rain drips from a nearby stanchion. Pigeons nibble at a discarded Kiora carton. The platform. Sways.

RedEye is here to meet a friend. He wouldn't be here otherwise, obviously; this is not his Saturday morning of choice. But it is necessary, because RedEye has a sickness, and when Redeye is ill he goes to see The Doctor. The Doctor has helped RedEye before, and The Doctor will help him this time. You cannot lose faith. It's what separates us from animals. Or was that opposable thumbs? RedEye can't remember. The headache blinds.

The station roof finishes just before the end of the platform, which slopes down into long grass and rusted iron, wet from blustery showers. This sort of rain gets everywhere, soaks you through effortlessly, unavoidably. RedEye puts his hood up anyway, skips over a discarded girder, and heads down a long-dead track towards the crumbling tunnel, past stone wall graffiti and faded beer cans.

Inside the tunnel it is pitch black. The spiders above have bodies as big as golf balls. Last time RedEye was here he brought a torch, and flipped it across the arched ceiling out of curiosity. Not this time. Sometimes it's best to know nothing. And if you feel something brush against your face...

"Hello RedEye," says a voice from the darkness. "Good to see you." RedEye can't see a thing. It is uncomfortable, but he's played this out before. "Come on then. The Doctor will see you now. Heh."

RedEye's hand is guided to a shoulder, and the pair walk in silence for a few minutes, RedEye stumbling, the figure sliding over rubble and debris as easily as a shadow. Slowly black turns to shape, but before those shapes become form, the voice comes again – "Sit down, won't you?" A gentle shove in the chest, and RedEye falls into something soft with a squelch. It feels like an armchair. Oh, RedEye hopes it is an armchair.

Then the flare of a match, and The Doctor – dirty and hairy and in the same Atari lab coat as always – lights candles. Relief: it *is* an armchair, and this is The Doctor's surgery. It is not sterile. The walls are shattered plywood leaning against brick, pinned with newspaper clippings; the floor is Escher-patterned carpet stolen from a university skip. In one corner there is a mattress; opposite it, a makeshift hearth is littered with charred gaming magazines. Along the wall opposite RedEye's armchair is a collection of arcade boards, stacked, vacuum packed and safe. The Doctor sits in front of it and raises his hands to his lips, as if in prayer.

"So, son, you're losing faith." He talks like a preacher, but he is not. The Doctor used to make games. Worked through the '80s and '90s on some things you'll have heard of, and some things you'll have played. Then he snapped – a single pixel in the wrong place, one byte over the memory limit – no one knows, just that, some broken day ten years ago, he quit, shaved his hair, burned his stuff, left bundles of cash outside the local hospital, and started to live the alternative lifestyle dream for real. Now he lives in his surgery. He takes a deep breath.

"Problem with your sort, the sort of people who read **Edge**," says The Doctor, "is that everyone's a fuckin' critic." Ah. You'll have to excuse RedEye's surgeon. He has a potty mouth. "See, sometimes it's best to know nothing. Come at things with innocence. Used to have a friend who loved *Rick Dangerous*. Piece of shit, that game. I knew that. But him, he'd never played anything else. Thought it was the best thing ever. He was happy. Happy." Redeye pleads education. He's falling out of love.

"Ah, don't come at me with those hug-me-I-hurt eyes. I am not your imaginary lover. I'm The Doctor, not the fuckin' dentist. Heh." The doctor coughs for a bit, recovers, and continues. "I am not gonna tell you everything's gonna be all right, because hell, I don't have a fuckin' clue. What I do know is that things are fine right now, the same as ever. Better, even. You don't know how lucky you are."

Redeye makes to say something, but the Doctor raises a hand. Shh.

"I read your column, you know. I knew you'd come crying soon after. Xbox MAME?" The Doctor explodes with laughter. He jacks a thumb at the airtight containers behind. "All that? Shit. All this?" he reaches down, brings up a damp copy of **Edge**, flicks to the reviews, "Shit? Shit? Shit?" He tears a page on every syllable, and RedEye catches glimpses of *Ikaruga*, *Monkey Ball*, *TimeSplitters2*, ripped apart by thick, dirty hands. "'Course not. Twenty years time, maybe, but right now, a fuckin' thrill, I'll bet. Things not as good as they used to be? Bullshit." The Doctor sighs, shakes his head.

"But you knew that already, didn't you? You're not loving old games, you're loving masturbatory nostalgia. You're jacking off on memories of an old girlfriend, except you don't remember what it was really like, just false memories, your photo album mixed with wild, crazy Internet porn. Let me remind you. It was fun for a while, and we had a great time, and everything was always the fuckin' same."

The same mazes, looping levels 'n' ladders, two-dimensional spaceships...

"Play something. Realise that you are fortunate, selfish, spoilt. There are more types of games than ever, and even the worst of them is a tiny miracle"

"Go home. Play something. Realise that you are fortunate, selfish, spoilt. There are more types of games than ever, and even the worst of them is a tiny electronic miracle. And the best? They're whisky, sex and the Devil, and people need showing, just like they always did. That's your job, finding things for them to love, not for you to hate. Play the games for fun, not to find out how they're broken."

RedEye looks up from the armchair, meekly, hopefully. "A prescription...?"

"Ahhh," says The Doctor, flailing a hand in disgust. "Just fuck off and play some games."

Chastened and silent, RedEye staggers back through the darkness and the pain and the people and the rain. At home, he sticks on the first thing that comes to hand, and he plays. Oh, he plays.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with **Edge***'s*

As Mario falls for the umpteenth time, after I've done nothing but adjust the camera, and I bounce my Wavebird angrily off the carpet, it hits me. This isn't the future of platform games; if anything, it feels like the end. A grand summary of the genre, but where can it go from here?

There are countless things to enjoy in *Super Mario Sunshine*, of course. It is stuffed with small brilliancies, excelling in the kind of non-essential surprises that can make exploring a videogame world so delightful: for instance, the plank hanging by ropes from a tree on the island off Gelato Beach. An experimental squirt and, yes, you begin to swing. The ropes creak beautifully and, at the right moment Mario describes a gorgeous parabola through the air, collecting coins on the way.

On the other hand, that apparent consistency of the water-pack's physics isn't a hard-and-fast rule. FLUDD's abilities, like too many things in the game, are artificially circumscribed to serve the game designers' purposes, rather than the player's. There seems no reason why, for example, if you are hovering at a great height and the water cuts off, you shouldn't be able to turn on the hover again before you land; the pack recovers much faster in squirt mode, after all, and you can make a lot of little hover jumps quite rapidly if you start from ground level.

The rule of threes, meanwhile, is applied so rigorously it seems almost sadistic. Fine, it takes three body slams to defeat the glorious steam-train giant caterpillar that is the Wiggler. Three bombs to kill the Weasel, three hits to finish Petey Piranha. But these people who need fruit – why do they need three bananas, or three coconuts? Three isn't a very large number, but it's large enough to make many of the game's tasks seem annoyingly repetitive. Oh, and time-limited fruit? Fruit that just disappears in a puff of smoke if you play around with it too long? Waaah. That just makes me feel like a baby whose rattle has been stolen. Not exactly the emotion that *Mario* games have traditionally induced.

Sunshine feels like a compendium of mini-games: many great fun; some horrifically annoying. (Three words: Yoshi's Fruit Adventure.) It's like a large tin of Quality Street, except you're forced to eat the ones you don't like, as well as your favourites. The way the levels are effectively cut off from each other with graffito warps means that there is little sense of a large, consistent world that all hangs together. A year after *Jak and Daxter* gave us a huge, lush environment in which anything you could see you could travel to, *Sunshine* feels retrograde.

Shigeru Miyamoto, of course, single-handedly invented the platform genre, so he can do what he likes. *Donkey Kong*'s difference was that it dramatised the verticality of an arcade cabinet screen: the environment itself became a puzzle. And it is this obstacle-course concept that has persisted through the genre's evolution in games as different as *Tomb Raider* and *Banjo-Kazooie*. Now, it's not so much that the obstacle course idea itself has been played out, but that the player is no longer given sufficient incentive to complete it. Collecting coins has become an end in itself. (Shines, coins, whatever: they're all just arbitrary tokens.)

Well, watching a number increase doesn't do it for me any more. Yoshi and a few extra nozzles don't provide enough consolation. Roughly half-way through, *Sunshine* has not evolved sufficiently to keep me interested. There is another way. There is a game that was hugely underrated at the time, that was a stealthy influence on subsequent instant classics, and that offered a very different take on the idea of the platform game: *Ape Escape*.



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Are platform games lacking focus?

There's a game that was hugely underrated at the time, and that offered a very different take on the platform game: Ape Escape"

To play it now is to recognise how ahead of its time it was. A funky gadget, a la *Sunshine*, that lets you explore the levels in a different way? Check: *Ape Escape* had the Sky Flyer, a hand-operated propeller, not to mention the wonderful radio-controlled mini-car. Amusing mini-games featuring simians, a la *Super Monkey Ball*? Check: *Ape Escape* had monkey skiing, monkey boxing and galaxy monkey, a 3D shooter.

But what *Ape Escape* really had in abundance was character. And I don't mean a bunch of NPCs preloaded with a few lines of textual exegesis. It was the monkeys themselves: the cute ways they would be fiddling, snoring or staring around paranoiacally when inspected with the Monkey Radar. The way one might suddenly appear, gloriously, sitting atop an enormous woolly mammoth or another might go postal with bombs and a machine gun attempting to evade capture. The way one was a fan of Bob Marley or another was named after David Ginola. It was this unity yet variety of character, along with a well-timed acquisition of new gadgets and skills, that made progress through the game compelling.

Around every new corner might be a new type of monkey that behaved in an amusingly different fashion to those before. *Ape Escape*'s environments were not hardcore obstacle courses of the type that *Super Mario Sunshine* offers. They had sections of "How do I get up there?" puzzlement, sure, but these were always in the service of the game's central activity – capturing monkeys. And running around trying to net screaming little furballs that seem to have a life of their own is arguably far more compelling than searching for pointless virtual currency. The one-joke *Ape Escape 2001* was thoroughly unworthy of its predecessor, but *Ape Escape 2* is on its way, and the monkey football mini-game looks as though it will be worth the price of entry all by itself.

What we have known for two decades as the platform game seems to be at a generic crossroads. *Super Mario Sunshine* has arguably taken the purist money-grubbing, obstacle-course concept as far as it ever needs to go. Meanwhile, forthcoming productions such as *Ratchet & Clank* or *Haven* want to push the genre further in the direction of becoming a giant Everygame, where flight-shooting stages can alternate with rollercoaster rides as well as vertically-oriented ambulatory exploration. But such maximalist approaches to the genre run the risk of lacking thematic focus. When everything including the kitchen sink is stuffed into a cartoony world of saturated colour and jolly music, the player is often left with a sense of a missing core. It's all periphery and no centre. For many people, the simple fact that it's Mario provides all the thematic core necessary for enjoyment of *Sunshine*. On the whole, though, I'm on the side of the monkeys.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: trighap@hotmail.com

Hello everyone. I wonder, are you connected to the Internet? I would guess so. I can't imagine that **Edge** readers wouldn't be. It is so integrated into our everyday lives these days. The word 'Internet' is commonplace; on TV, it's perfectly natural to see an address appearing at the bottom of the screen: "For more information please log on to…" The revolution has happened so fast.

But is it inclusive? I mean, how many people don't understand the messages at the bottom of the screen? In my family there is no Internet. They are modest fish vendors and don't have any interest in technology. But anyone can understand the Internet, right? The other day, as a test, I asked one of them if he knew about it. The immediate answer was no, but I kept with my question and asked him if he knew any addresses. There was a sparkle in his eye as he told me that he'd heard about such things. Aha, I was sure he'd secretly developed an interest in the Internet. But it was just a misunderstanding, he was referring to normal mail addresses!

Anyway, I tried to explain to him what it was about. I had to begin by making him comfortable with English words such as 'Internet' and 'address'. The process was not without obstacles. "Why don't we use the Japanese word for address?" How do you answer such a question? "Well, you can't use it. It is not wrong but you should use the same words as everybody else." Eventually, I managed to make him understand these words. With more effort still, I managed to teach him that you can communicate between computers (I even had to teach him the word 'pasokon', the Japanese word for 'personal computer') just as you can with phones. I think that's quite something if you consider that my father will be 75 this year (and of course, that he is a fish vendor with no love of technology). I wanted to teach him to communicate via the Internet and use it to gather information. And, to be honest, I wanted to show him my company's home page.

You know how much parents are very sweet to their children? The way they are proud of them, show interest in every achievement? Mine are just like that. When they heard I was writing for a magazine, they rushed out to get one. Because of my work, I don't have many opportunities to visit my parents, so they are very happy to see my picture, my words in a magazine. Can you believe that they even bought a copy of **Edge**? I mean, there was no way they could get a copy where they live, the local bookstore had never heard of it. But they made so much effort to get a copy, and eventually managed it. However, they had no idea the magazine was in English, and told me how disappointed they were to find out it was. That's why I wanted to show my parents my company's home page, so they can read about what I've been doing.

But that day seems far off. I think they understood some points, but making the leap to online, to interacting? It's so difficult. Anyway, the problems have made me think. Perhaps technological development is limited by age. But, if that's true, how can we measure it? Seventy-five may be difficult, but is it a limit? Those with a greater affinity to technology will learn quicker through curiosity, just like children in a new environment. But the more stubborn? That's more difficult. And even among those who consider themselves Internet literate, there are many who don't know how to use features such as the bookmark or the history option.

That kind of person never begins by reading the manual. We – because I am one of them too – prefer to learn ourselves, or watch what others do. The manual is useless, or appears so to us. Why? Simple. They're so difficult. A person who is discovering the Internet has no base. How can they understand 'double click', particularly if their only language is Japanese? What about "Hold the cursor on the icon…" – in Japanese books, 'hold', 'cursor', and 'icon' would all be in English. How could this person possibly understand this?

It's wrong, of course. There needs to be a base. Nowadays, most of the people stating to surf the Internet are people who are touching a computer for the very first time. It must be a nightmare for these beginners, because computers these days have so many functions. It's like being a newcomer to mobile phones. Technology-inclined people began with the old rotary phones, then to the push phone, to the answering machine with a waiting melody, then to the mobile. It's a slow curve for people who do not need it. Imagine if you've never seen a phone before, and you're handed the latest mobile. Imagine you get a top-of-the-range PC, and the only thing you've ever used is a calculator. Imagine being given a videogame – almost any videogame – having never played one before. That's the problem. We must make things accessible.

Recently I started using a PC. I'm originally a designer, so I developed a great passion for graphics techniques and I've used a Mac for years. But one day, I was told by a network engineer that putting Mac and PC together was a lot of trouble. So I sent for a PC; as soon as I saw the three buttons on the mouse, I wanted a return to simplicity. For Mac users, the PC is a completely different world. The text I'm writing now is done on a PC. Can someone tell me why there are so many different Microsoft applications on it? What does this icon mean? Why does F4 close the window? Do I read the manual? I can read English, so I can read it without any obstacles. Reading the manual I started to discover lots of things. Without it, Windows looks clueless.

So, to close, I would like to address a request to hardware and software makers, particularly those in the games industry. Please make the manuals friendlier to each country, easier to understand. Use the words of each country, without any exclusive terms; let's make manuals for *everyone*. I know there will be opposition to my thinking, because it's true that to get a global understanding of something you would need one single language. But to me, the manuals are important. They need to be understood and I make that the priority. Don't you agree?

The first thing is comprehension; but so many people bombard you with detail. Sometimes you need to buy a book to understand the manual. That's how we live. Don't you think it's strange? Someone once said that you could measure the level of a civilisation by the thickness of the manual. I really hope it isn't true, but who knows, it may be. Right now, our civilisation is not developing, and bigger manuals are not the answer. See you.




AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

Manuals: why can't they be easier to read?

"Imagine being given a videogame – any videogame – having never played one before. That's the problem. We must make things accessible"

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4





TOKYO GAME LIFE

Lupin Kojima, sub editor-in-chief, 'Game Wave DVD'

Fox McCloud's latest adventure leaves Kojima-san cold

So, I finally got the chance to play *Star Fox Adventures* on the Nintendo GameCube. And soon afterwards came the moment I had to review this big GameCube title, in 'Weekly Famitsu's Cross Review. I gave it seven points, from a maximum of ten. It wasn't easy. In fact, it filled me with a great deal of sadness to put a mark like that on a Nintendo GameCube title.

A seven may seem quite high, but for a title developed by Rare and published by Nintendo it is very disappointing. Game reviews in Japan are very different and since the space for comments next to the score is limited, reviewers for 'Weekly Famitsu' must use their words in a very precise way. Here are mine for *Star Fox Adventures*: "It's as much entertainment as a movie, but it doesn't manage to provide the well balanced and polished gameplay you would expect from a Nintendo title." Writing that was very hard for me.

The reason? Because when we think about *Star Fox*, it is one of the main memories of the golden age for the Super Famicom. *Star Fox* was one of the central figures among shooting games. The original game was so addictive that I would play it over and over, again and again. When it was first released it was a big smash hit here in Japan. More than that, it had Nintendo's fingerprint, the clever way the characters appealed to such a wide audience, from children to adults. All of that was in the original cartridge, and then I heard that this experience was coming to GameCube.

When I first heard this news, I was – like all the other *Star Fox* veterans in Japan – extremely excited. For a long time I waited and waited for the game to finally be released. But when the release day came round and I picked up the GameCube controller, I was a little shocked. I tried very hard to control Fox McCloud and to play with *Star Fox Adventures* like I'd dreamt. Yet as much as I tried, I have to say that I did not feel the excitement that I had been expecting. In fact, it fell very short of my hopes and dreams.

If you look at this game from the outside, at its skin alone, you see a game similar to *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*. It is an action adventure in the same vein. But if, like many, you're a player who has enjoyed Nintendo games for a while, from the moment you pick up the controller you have a strange feeling about this game, even some fear. I have not given *Star Fox Adventures* seven out of ten because the series has become an action adventure game or because the shooting part is average. No, it's because I'm a hardcore fan of Nintendo and, as someone who knows Nintendo's best games, there's no way I can award eight, nine or ten points to this title. I have not felt this kind of malaise about a Nintendo title in all the previous ones, until…

Recently, I had a look at the sales figures of games published by Nintendo for its system, the GameCube. According to the 25/10 issue of 'Weekly Famitsu', *Star Fox Adventures*, which was released on September 25, 2002, managed to ship 133,871 copies (these figures were recorded from September 23–29). *Super Mario Sunshine*, which was released on July 19, had only sold 609,405 copies by September the 29. To be honest, GameCube titles are not selling very well in Japan. And yes, when I saw *Super Mario Sunshine*'s sale figures I was very sad. I mean Mario, the single boldest symbol representing Japan on the videogame market… well, that the new episode has not even reached the million mark in Japan is surprising and sad. I wonder if this is a very bad omen for the company?

Now, for *Star Fox Adventures*, given the first week's sales figures and the original game's popularity, it would be fair to think that it would sell somewhere between 300,000 and 500,000 copies in few months. But again, it will never be a million seller. We know that the Nintendo GameCube is a superb piece of hardware. This much is obvious when you just look at the quality of the games released on it, at the graphical beauty of the best titles, coupled with the perfect design and friendliness of the controller, at so many great game experiences. But the number of smash hit titles are rare, and because of this game makers cannot survive releasing games on that one platform alone, so they are aiming at several markets at the same time; PlayStation2, Xbox and GameCube.

I had many hopes for *Star Fox Adventures* on the Japanese GameCube. Nintendo and Rare, working together on this legendary character – what could possibly go wrong? We expected a blockbuster.

Nintendo has this great philosophy about videogames that they repeat over and over again: it is not about hardware but about games. But, *Star Fox Adventures* is different, and it is not a classic Nintendo title, not the game I was expecting. Maybe those of you who have played it have felt the same things as me, a Japanese player. It hurts me to write this, but it is a very average game experience. However, I suppose it has a potential as an entertainment experience. I'm sure many players are impressed by the way the events and cut-scenes progress in the game.

But for hardcore Nintendo fans these elements, although they are sure to impress others, do not matter. Videogames are not about 'watching' but 'interacting'. Indeed, it was Nintendo's games that taught me this. It is not enough just to try and make a game like *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* on the N64. It has to be a true Nintendo game, where the more you play the more you get involved.

"I'm a hardcore fan of Nintendo and, as someone who knows its best games, there's no way I can award eight, nine or ten points to this title"

Yes, "videogames are about games and not hardware"; those are the words from the former president of Nintendo, Mr Yamauchi. But more and more, I feel like it's getting impossibly complicated to make the game that I, and other fans, dream of for the GameCube. We want one that takes advantage of the system's particular strong points, like *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, or *Super Mario 64* did on the N64. Looking at the Japanese market for GameCube, I think dark thoughts.

But I have hope. I still wait for Nintendo's titles, like no other company – the kind of games that push you to buy them and the console at the same time. I'm sure *Legend of Zelda* on GameCube will be one of these. But the killer title I really wanted, *Star Fox Adventures*, certainly wasn't such a game.

Lupin Kojima is the sub editor-in-chief of 'Game Wave DVD', part of the Famitsu publishing portfolio

prescreen

Incoming electronic entertainment from across the globe

Edge's most wanted

Biohazard 0

Capcom still doesn't appear to have updated the voice acting to the same extent as the quite splendid visuals, but partner swapping is always intriguing.



(GameCube) Capcom

Rune II

Card-collecting games are not for everyone, but From Software's excellent Rune managed to be both deep and accessible. **Edge** only hopes the sequel is longer.



(GameCube) From Software

True Fantasy Star Online

This elegant game promises to let you to live out your wildest swords 'n' sorcery fantasies. Or failing that, you can always resort to chopping wood for a living.



(Xbox) Microsoft Game Studios

Warhammer Online

The chance to relive youthful wanderings through the Warhammer universe without fear of stigma has **Edge** rather excited. As does a quite unique magic system.



(PlayStation2) Eidos

East versus west

What Japanese dreams are made on

A glance at this month's prescreen line-up reveals a range of Japanese esoterica. Even by **Edge** standards, the list is remarkable. The games even more so. Use any words you want: dynamic, anomalous, outlandish, vibrant, bizarre, freakish. Japanese games are just different from anything you get coming out of European or US code houses. *Magic Carpet*? *Jak and Daxter*? *Grand Theft Auto III*? It's like comparing Constable to Picasso.

O.TO.GI, *Panzer Dragoon Orta*, *Crimson Sea*, *Sudeki* all have a distinctive flavour that screams Japan. Could you ever imagine any of these titles flowering in any other part of the world? And before you write to complain: this is not a diatribe against the perceived lack of originality in the west. **Edge** wholeheartedly believes that innovation is just as prevalent on both sides of the globe. No, what Japanese games have in abundance is a refinement and visual flair that's hard to mimic.

That Japanese game designers have powerful imaginations fired by a kaleidoscopic influx of cultural stimuli is unquestionable. But where does the ability to hone and polish games to an incredible lustre spring from? One answer lays in the structure of Japanese society itself. Obedience and discipline underpins the Japanese way of life. Hundreds of coders can be put onto a single floor to bug test or produce menu screens with hardly a trace of complaint, while a team of artists might specialise in constructing floor textures for the whole length of a project.

The other major factor is that Japanese companies are not ashamed of reusing old ideas and code to a ridiculous degree. In fact, it's almost expected – think *Street Fighter II* and *Biohazard*. On the outside, Japanese games project a rampant flamboyance, on the inside they are the result of years of conservative engineering. Conversely, western developers often try radical new ideas at the start of every project because they are castigated if they decide to make yet another version of platform game X.

But Japanese developers have a greater power: they don't have to target a game at the 20-something male. Videogames are such a part of Japanese life that a fishing game can do well, and appeal to a wide enough audience, to warrant further experimentation in the sequel. Which rather begs the question: when will videogames truly reach the massmarket in the west if the current risk-averse publishing trend continues? The journey to that goal is likely to be a slow one.













O.TO.GI

From Software continues its Xbox development drive with one of the strongest entries in the oversubscribed samurai/ninja sim genre



Aerial combat is a significant aspect of *O.TO.GI*'s fairytale ambience, requiring a simple and rewarding combo system to maintain your trajectory

Now here's a rare commodity – a big-name Japanese publisher apparently still committed to developing games for Xbox. Better known for its blockbusting *Armored Core* series on PSone and PlayStation2, From Software has yet to turn to the griping and carping about Microsoft's Japanese strategy that other publishers have resorted to. Instead the company remains focused on bringing out a wide-ranging selection of software for the console. And although the company's first outing on the hardware, *Murakumo*, wasn't entirely successful (see **E**115), *Thousand Land* (**E**116) is undeniably interesting. But by far the strongest card that the company currently holds is *O.TO.GI*.

At the recent Tokyo Game Show, there were titles with a more obvious commercial appeal than *O.TO.GI*.– Capcom's *Devil May Cry 2*, for example, or Konami's *Metal Gear Solid 2 Substance*. And the game also faces stiff competition from other titles that will be overcrowding the ninja/samurai genre in the near future, titles such as *Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven* (see p38), *Shinobi* and *Ninja Gaiden*.

"From the atmospheric soundtrack to the first appearance of the supernaturally under-populated landscapes, it seizes your attention"

However, the appeal of *O.TO.GI* is obvious from the moment you pick up the Xbox controller and start playing. From the opening strains of the hauntingly atmospheric soundtrack to the first appearance of the almost disembodied, supernaturally under-populated landscapes, the game reaches out and seizes your attention.

It's only when the sublimely haptic sense of control is first discovered, though, that it becomes clear that From Software is creating something that has the potential to be very special. Set during Japan's Golden Age, the game draws on the vast potential of Japanese fairytale, legend and myth, casting players as Raikou, a samurai whose job it is to pit his wits against spiritual and demonic entities in search of treasure. The preternatural mood of the 'Raikouki' series of fairytales has been captured with almost unprecedented thoroughness, but the developer has also added a few twists of its own.

For example, the team has stated that it has attempted to incorporate some of



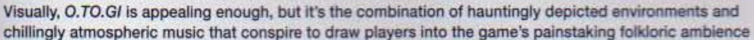
Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **From Software**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **December 12 (Japan)**





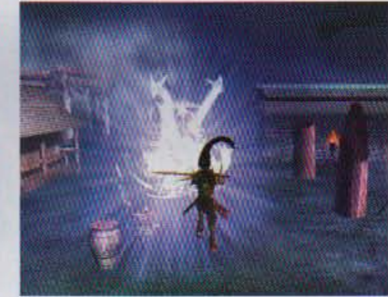












Visually, *O.TO.GI* is appealing enough, but it's the combination of hauntingly depicted environments and chillingly atmospheric music that conspire to draw players into the game's painstaking folkloric ambience

the actual (and philosophically meaningful) architecture and layout of religious settlements as they would have appeared at the time, adding to the game's almost ethereally sombre mood.

It seems a shame though to be devoting quite so much effort to level design, as a large part of *O.TO.GI*'s viscerally satisfying gameplay is derived from smashing up the scenery. Indeed it's difficult to imagine the game's deformable terrain and objects on hardware other than the Xbox. *Red Faction*'s Geo-Mod system is clumsy and poorly integrated by comparison.

Judging by the demo disk given away at the Tokyo Game Show, the destruction of the environment is actually a core component of the game, with destroyed buildings uncovering special objects, or crumbling cliff faces giving way to reveal secret passages. But taking care of the incessant waves of demonic assailants is equally important. And although Raikou can't fly, a double jump and combo system (similar but more intuitive and easier than *Gun Valkyrie*) can keep him in the air. This ability is important, because there are a number of aerial opponents, all of which visually capture the haunting essence of Japanese folklore.

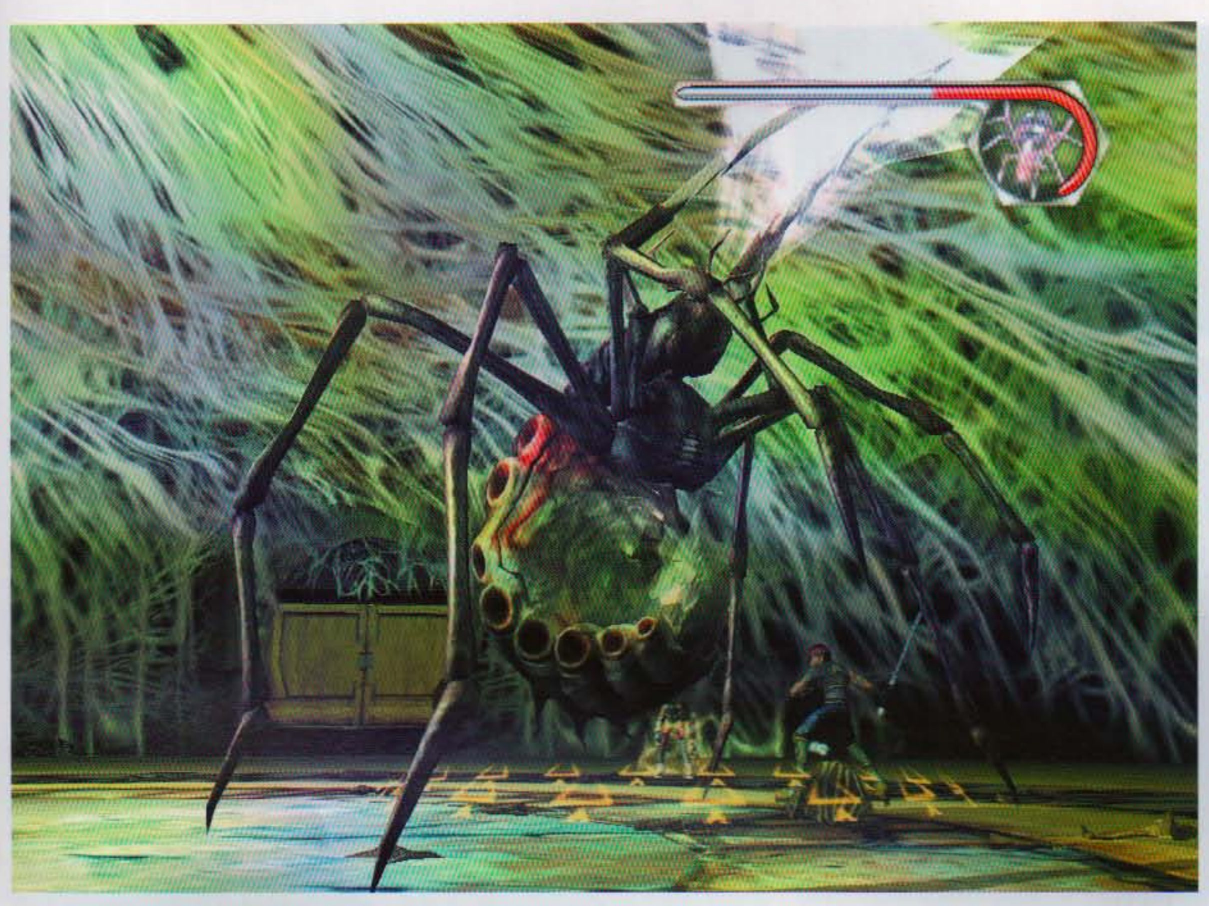
Indeed it's this evocative atmosphere, combined with the fundamental simplicity of the control system, that bodes so well for *O.TO.GI*. It's probably not a game that's going to alter dramatically the fortunes of the Xbox in Japan, but it looks, at the moment, like a game that certainly deserves to.



The emphasis on scenery destruction produces a histrionic, but visceral and engaging experience, which is complemented by an immediate and simple control interface and an uncomplicated combat system

Sudeki

Microsoft finally answers the prayers of RPG-starved Xbox owners with this visual banquet, mixing roleplay basics with Hong Kong film action








The battles in *Sudeki* take place in realtime and involve a huge range of both long- and short-range weapons and spells. Magic can also be used to weaken enemy defences, as well as speed up attacks

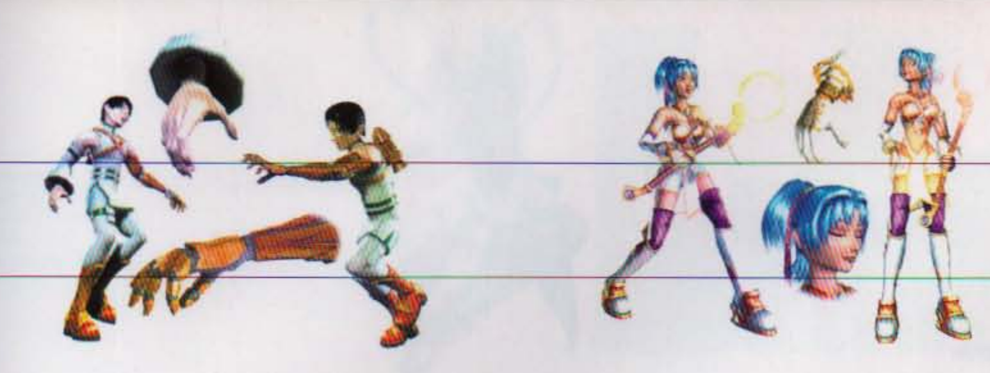
Microsoft has finally noticed that the Xbox catalogue is alarmingly bereft of high-quality RPG titles – you know, the sort of game that routinely sells in its millions on other platforms. Hence *Sudeki*, an action-orientated RPG developed by UK-based Climax, an outfit probably best known for its recent *MotoGP* outing on Xbox, but also working on the superficially similar PC title, *Warhammer Online*. *Sudeki* is set in a gothic fantasy world where realms of dark and light co-exist on top of each other (along the lines of *Shadow Man* and *Soul Reaver*, perhaps). What gamers will first notice are the sumptuous cathedral-like locations, the detailed character models (lip-synching and facial animation are both in use) and the astonishing effects as the world morphs between its light and shadowy incarnations – all courtesy of an Xbox-exclusive proprietary graphics engine.

Beneath the bump-mapping, the multi-coloured lighting and the looming architectural splendour, a familiar RPG heart beats. There are four characters to control – "a sorceress, a steam-punk gunslinger, a powerful man-at-arms and a shape-shifting huntress" – each with skills, spells and weapons to upgrade and add to as you go along. Exploration is combined with NPC interaction and, of course, combat – with hundreds of varied beasts to go up against.

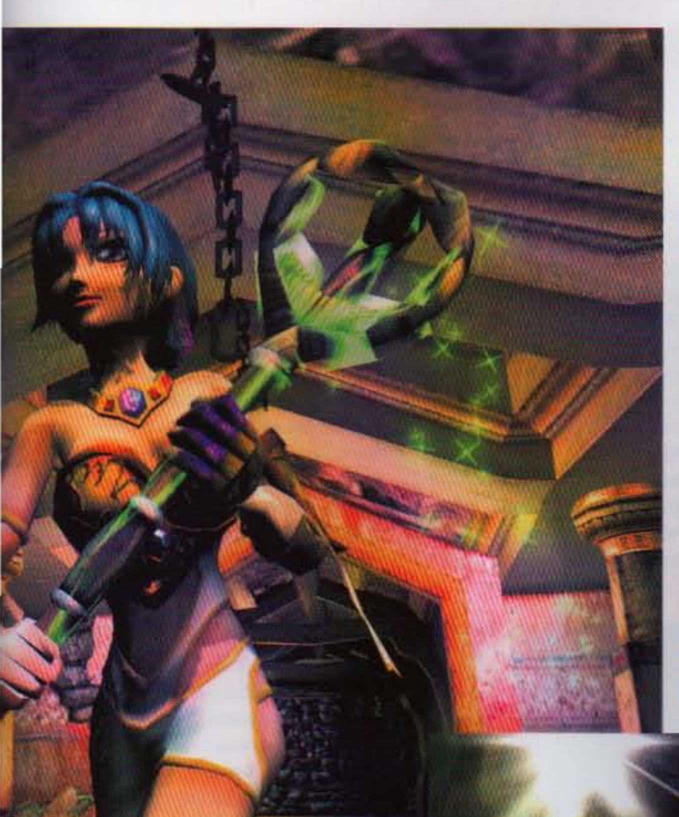
Here's where Climax strays from the usual RPG biology. Fight scenes are realtime and offer a range of moves, the most impressive of which are accompanied by 'Matrix'-style bullet-time effects. Indeed, Climax has cited Hong Kong cinema as an influence, which makes a change from the usually twee nature of turn-based mêlée. Interestingly, the four characters are also be able to combine to produce super-strike attacks of devastating power – and nice lighting, **Edge** suspects.

Gamers have been waiting years for a title to combine traditional RPG structures with a truly dynamic fighting system consisting of





Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studios**
Developer: **Climax**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Christmas 2003**













more than just pressing X. *Sudeki* offers just that, along with an enormous gameworld, a twisting narrative and of course those marvellous visuals. Cynics may sum it all up as a mélange of used ideas, with *Max Payne* and *Soul Reaver* bound to crop up in many a comparative preview, but *Sudeki* has the potential to rise above the sum of its parts. Once in a while, even in an industry where compromise ruthlessly stalks ambition, potential is sometimes realised.

This giant spider is one of over 100 different enemy creatures (above). Fortunately, the four playable characters can combine to create super-strike moves and defeat such creatures. The fighting takes place seamlessly within the huge game environment – which apparently features no loading times

Crimson Sea

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Koei**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **November (Japan), Q2 2003 (UK)**
Previously in **E**112

Microsoft will be hoping that Koei repeats its Dynasty Warriors magic with its first Xbox exclusive

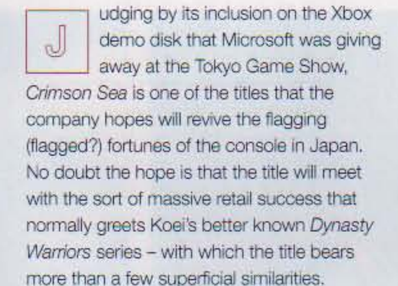






Judging by its inclusion on the Xbox demo disk that Microsoft was giving away at the Tokyo Game Show, *Crimson Sea* is one of the titles that the company hopes will revive the flagging (flagged?) fortunes of the console in Japan. No doubt the hope is that the title will meet with the sort of massive retail success that normally greets Koei's better known *Dynasty Warriors* series – with which the title bears more than a few superficial similarities.

Indeed, though it's a lazy comparison to make, it's all too easy to describe *Crimson Sea* as just *Dynasty Warriors* with guns. There's the same emphasis on throwing wave after wave of seemingly endless attackers at players (though in this case the enemy ranks are composed of alien nasties rather than historical troops). There's a similar need to understand the larger tactical picture, and to maximise the assistance offered by your AI-controlled allies. But above all, *Crimson Sea* boasts an identical simplicity of interface, and consequently a sense of exhilaration that matches anything the *Dynasty Warriors* series has to offer. In fact with Koei promising up to 1,000 enemies onscreen at any one time, it may even go some way to eclipsing it.



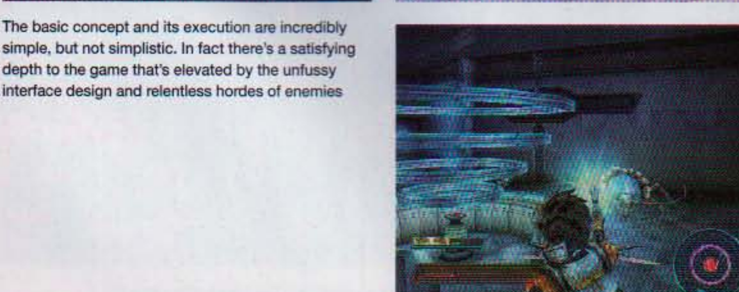


The basic premise is that as a futuristic, amnesiac hero, you take on these endless waves of opponents with a basic, upgradeable weapon and a special psionic attack that charges up as enemies are dispatched. And unlike the faceless sidekicks featured in *Dynasty Warriors*, your AI accomplices each have different strengths and weaknesses as well as a prominent health bar. Which means that in addition to tailoring your strategy to their offensive capabilities, it's also necessary to take care of their defensive frailties if the game's missions are to be overcome. Judging by the TGS demo, it will at least be essential to keep them alive to meet end-of-level bosses, because the one in the demo is a colossal fire-breathing, egg-laying behemoth. And while this is an undeniably old skool play mechanic, it's no less thrilling because of it.

It remains to be seen whether *Crimson Sea* is enough to raise the almost terminal profile of Microsoft's console in Japan. **Edge** is certainly sold, but will the Japanese public, come the game's release?



The basic concept and its execution are incredibly simple, but not simplistic. In fact there's a satisfying depth to the game that's elevated by the unfussy interface design and relentless hordes of enemies



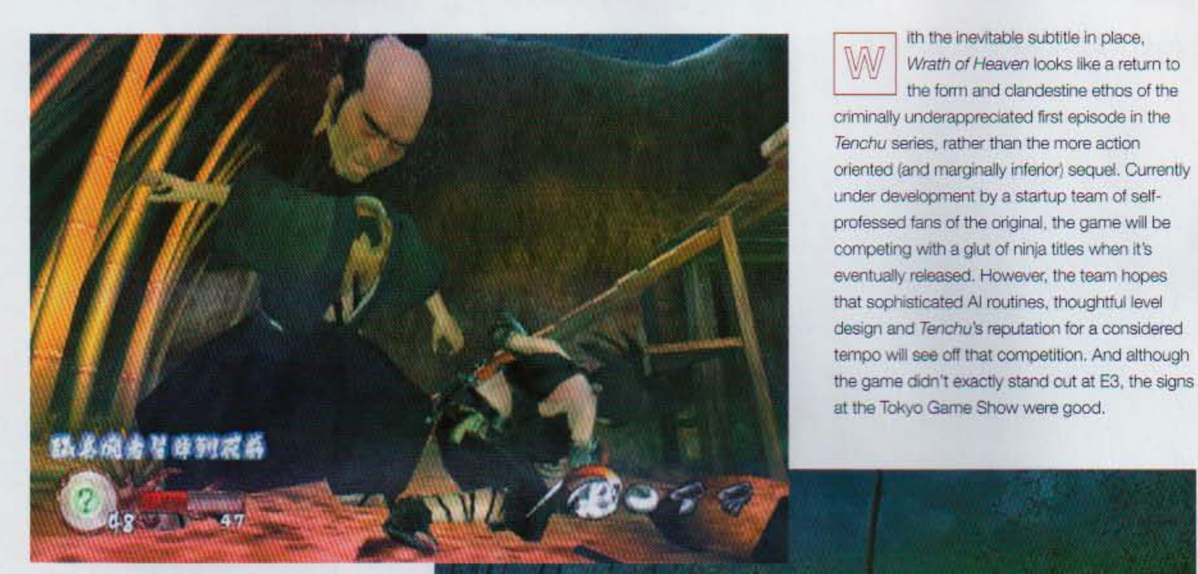


There's no denying the visceral thrills that *Crimson Sea* offers, but whether the game's commercial performance matches that of Koei's better known franchises remains to be seen. Judging by early demos, it deserves to

Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven

Format: **PS2, Xbox, GC**
Publisher: **TDK Mediactive**
Developer: **Vicious Cycle**
Origin: **US**
Release: **November (PS2, Xbox), December (GC)**
Previously in **E**112

Formerly Tenchu 3, the third chapter in Activision's seminal stealth series sees a return to sneaking around



With the inevitable subtitle in place, *Wrath of Heaven* looks like a return to the form and clandestine ethos of the criminally underappreciated first episode in the *Tenchu* series, rather than the more action oriented (and marginally inferior) sequel. Currently under development by a startup team of self-professed fans of the original, the game will be competing with a glut of ninja titles when it's eventually released. However, the team hopes that sophisticated AI routines, thoughtful level design and *Tenchu*'s reputation for a considered tempo will see off that competition. And although the game didn't exactly stand out at E3, the signs at the Tokyo Game Show were good.

The basic mechanics are broadly similar to previous titles in the series. Taking the part of one of three playable characters, players must sneak and assassinate their way to victory, negotiating a path through guard posts with a variety of items available to assist the subterfuge. A poisoned rice ball, for example, that can distract human guards and incapacitate guard dogs, or a grappling hook to facilitate rooftop evasions. The major difference, though, between this instalment and previous chapters in the series is the introduction of the nine kanji that traditionally encapsulated a ninja's philosophy and preparation.

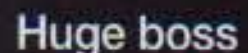
For every stealth kill, one of these kanji is lit. But every time your character is spotted by the enemy, one is lost. When all nine are lit, the character acquires a new power, be it a new combo or a new move, such as the ability to crawl on the ceiling, or even feign death – increasing the ease with which the game's roster of human, zombie and automaton opponents can be avoided.

The team claims that level design facilitates emergent possibilities, and watching the game in action, it seems churlish to doubt it. Items and abilities can be combined to attain objectives in a variety of different ways, while the levels are subtly different for each playable character. More important, when it comes to extending the longevity of the game, is the inclusion of both competitive and cooperative twoplayer modes, each of which boasts the same amount of detailed care and attention that appears to have gone into the singleplayer game. Which, at this stage at least, seems rather a lot.





One-hit kills will be the order of the day when *Wrath of Heaven* is released, since lighting up all nine ninja kanji results in a wider range of moves and combos



Huge boss

As with previous episodes, the nine singleplayer missions are punctuated by boss encounters. Although **Edge** has only witnessed one of these, it certainly seemed to be well conceived. Colourful and entertaining, but not too prescriptive, it featured a female kung fu master, who controlled a rather sizeable, brutish bodyguard through the use of corrupt kanji – requiring the player to avoid him while attempting to attack her.





Necroscope

Format: **Xbox, PS2**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **Mobius Entertainment**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q4 2003**

A cocktail of Jedi mind tricks and sophisticated espionage, Mobius Entertainment's first foray into survival horror is bound to be a terrifying prospect



Mobius has been grafting hard to get the engine and base technology constructed. Screenshots show that the game is likely to be more *Silent Hill* than *Biohazard*, but there's a long way to go yet

"Imagine being a unique blend of a Jedi Knight and James Bond," invites the press release accompanying the first exclusive screens of *Necroscope*. Based on Brian Lumley's popular sci-fi horror novels, *Necroscope* is clearly fertile ground for some quality survival horror antics. Imagine defeating vampires with the aid of extra-sensory perception. Imagine hunting them down with your wily detective skills.

At present there's not much in the way of working gameplay components to offer a clairvoyant judgement on the game's prospects. However, the developer's ambitions are interesting. In keeping with the central tenets of the books, Mobius is going to give the player some clever supernatural powers with which to conjur. The possession of other characters is possible along with a range of psychic abilities that aid both the detection and the defeat of enemies. Disturbing body-morphing technology and a range of pyrotechnical effects round things off nicely.

Not that **Edge** hasn't heard such wild claims before, but *The Thing* has shown (if not entirely convincingly) that the survival horror genre can still be stretched into interesting territory. Hopefully, some well thought out design will deliver a game capable of providing some genuinely creepy and unpredictable scenarios, rather than the linear set-pieces gamers have become accustomed to.





Lumley's super-vampires, the Wamphyri, want to take over the planet. It's up to you to send them home with their protrusions between their stumps

Silent Hill 3

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **In-house (Team Silent)**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **2003**

Previously in **E**112

Konami breaks its silence to reveal a playable demo at the Tokyo Game Show, suggesting that its survival horror series is still going strong





A new, female, lead character is to be introduced in the next chapter. Called Heather, she appears to be a bit more gung ho than her predecessors



The game maintains the reputation of the series for the gothic brilliance of its visuals, and a more action-oriented experience is promised this time around – hopefully with less of the aimless wandering that characterised its prequels

Having unveiled the title with a suitably moody movie at E3, it evidently wasn't until the Tokyo Game Show that Konami felt ready to reveal a playable demo of the latest chapter in the almost impenetrably plotted *Silent Hill* series. It would, of course, be asking too much to expect the demo to give away a great deal of information about the storyline, since it's clear that the latest sequel aims to derive as much impact from an air of ambiguity and almost surreal sense of mystery as have previous episodes.

Nevertheless, the developer has gone on record to say that it's aiming for a slightly more explicable plot this time around, and it's also clear that the rather patchy balance of action and exploration that undermined the first two episodes is also set to be addressed. Both titles were let down by aimless and somewhat unnecessary wandering, which will hopefully be eliminated from this sequel. Certainly the new female lead character is eventually able to access a machine gun, and the game's controls have been tweaked to provide a more responsive action experience.

Apart from these major differences, the playable demo also suggests that the hallmark visuals and disturbing menagerie of creatures will be making a return in *Silent Hill 3*, but there will no doubt be another lengthy wait until Konami is set to reveal any more.

Panzer Dragoon Orta

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Smilebit**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **January 2003 (UK)**
Previously in **E**112

News of a delayed release for this Smilebit-developed sequel was offset by the demonstration of a sleeker, streamlined version at the Tokyo Game Show





Graphically the game is unsurprisingly resplendent, but there's also a larger strategic element than in the first two *Panzer Dragoon* titles

P*anzer Dragoon* has evolved. Earlier this year the playable demo that was on show at E3 seemed almost complete. Which is kind of the point; newer, smoother, controls allow easy switching between dragon forms, giving the game a greater strategic dimension. At E3, pyrotechnic visuals and an exhilarating on-rails ride demonstrated significant promise and suggested that Sega was set to recapture the spirit of the original series. In truth there didn't seem too many areas in which there was still room for improvement. But having pushed back the release date for the game, the recent demonstration at the Tokyo Game Show saw a much improved version on display, boasting even crisper, more resplendent graphics, a more subtly balanced level design and more responsive controls.

The most noticeable impact of these changes is that it is now easier to cycle through the three different dragon incarnations – a reflection of the importance that the game places upon the strategic use of the particular strengths of each one. The various controls have also been shifted around the controller surprisingly effectively, with the result that the Tokyo Game Show demo boasts a more nuanced and immediate handling than its E3 predecessor. And while the Xbox appears to be beyond rescue in Japan, *Panzer Dragoon* is one of a growing number of striking and enjoyable titles set for release in the region.

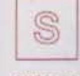


It will be possible to play the part of both sides of the epic conflict depicted in *Panzer Dragoon Orta* when it's finally set for its delayed release

Metal Gear Solid 2 Substance

Format: **PS2, Xbox (Europe and US only)**
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **In-house (KCEJ)**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **TBC**
Previously in **E**112

Solid Snake benefits from a hands-on demonstration by Hideo Kojima himself at the Tokyo Game Show



Since the announcement that *Metal Gear Solid 2 Substance* was set to 'premiere' on Xbox, Konami seems to have tempered its enthusiasm for Microsoft's console. Although it hasn't actually announced anything officially, strong rumours suggest that in Japan the game will only be released on PlayStation2. It's also currently unclear whether this will mean that the Xbox versions still set for release in the US and Europe will be as 'definitive' as was promised at E3, which, though it doesn't matter to **Edge**, will no doubt matter immensely to Microsoft.

Whatever, at the Tokyo Game Show, series creator and 'Newsweek'-endorsed dignitary Hideo Kojima seemed unbothered by such trifles as he gave an enthusiastic hands-on demonstration of the game (on PlayStation2 by the looks of things). His main focus was on the game's more lighthearted VR missions, including the defence of a bowl of soup from a hungry horde of advancing soldiers, and a battle between Snake and a giant robot soldier equipped with mini-soldier minions.

Although the level of interest in *Substance* in Japan is reportedly relatively low, Kojima-san's demonstration suggested that the prospects for the finished product in terms of quality are good. And, yes, according to the latest information from Konami insiders, you will be able to pilot a skateboarding Snake across a half pipe.



Apart from the thrills offered by Snake's half-pipe, the focus of *Substance* is on VR missions that add real variety to the *Metal Gear* experience. There's also a clear injection of humour that contrasts sharply with the po-faced plot of the original





It's unlikely to be released on Xbox in Japan, but fortunately European Xbox owners will finally be able to experience *Metal Gear* for themselves

Prescreen Alphas This month's announcements and updates...

Armored Core 3: Silent Line

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: From Software
Developer: In-house





From Software can't justifiably be accused of failing to exploit its franchises. *Silent Line* is the latest and far from unexpected expansion for *Armored Core*, featuring new missions and parts

Break Down

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Namco
Developer: In-house





An FPS beat 'em up? The video-only TGS presentation didn't give much away but you're part of a twoperson commando team and, so far, weapons have only been seen during cinematics

Breaker

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Tecmo
Developer: In-house





An online adventure in which you control a four-soldier team. Make your way through levels, shoot anything that moves, collect cash to buy better weapons. Don't worry, there's more to this

Cool Girl

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house

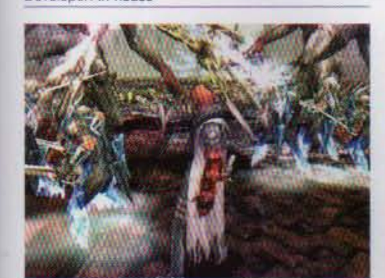




The eponymous cool girl looks frighteningly similar to *MGS2*'s Raiden, while the interface also evokes a certain sense of déjà vu. It even combines real world and cyberspace locales

Chaos Legion

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-house





Borrowing stylistically from Capcom's own *Devil May Cry*, in gameplay terms this is actually more similar to Koei's *Dynasty Warriors* series. And at the moment it's all looking very promising

Contra: Shattered Soldier

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house





Another TGS attendee, this update of the classic 16bit adventure looks likely to warm the hearts of the older hardcore community. Newcomers, though, may wonder what all the fuss is about

DoA Xtreme Beach Volleyball

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Tecmo
Developer: In-house (Team Ninja)





A new video promo gave some idea of the setting for *DoAX*; it's an extended answer to the hypothetical question of what would happen if Zack were to win the Dead or Alive tournament

The House of the Dead III

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Wow Entertainment





Having failed to wow attendees at the JAMMA arcade show, this probably went down marginally better at the TGS, but it's difficult to see what it does better than its predecessors

MotoGP 3

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Namco
Developer: In-house





While **Edge** has firsthand experience of the team's dedication to the *MotoGP* series, it's difficult to see this matching Climax's *MotoGP: URT*, regardless of the obvious improvements

Roommania #203

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Wave Master





This PlayStation2 sequel to the relatively inexplicable Dreamcast room-mate simulation is unlikely to make it to the west, which is a shame, as it features a dog and a TV crew

Super Battle Hoshin

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Koei
Developer: In-house





Koei's *Dynasty Warriors*-lite will now be making an appearance on PlayStation2 as well as GameCube, featuring additional missions and events, as well as a fourplayer Multitap mode

StarCraft Ghost

Format: Xbox, PS2, GC
Publisher: Vivendi
Developer: Blizzard





As Nova, a ghost agent, you must infiltrate a rebel base relying on your impressive stealth and combat techniques. Promising action-heavy departure for otherwise RTS-focused Blizzard

Shinobi

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sega
Developer: OverWorks





Facing stiff ninja competition, Sega's *Shinobi* is probably the longest serving of the various imminent stealth warriors. But although this is reasonably promising, he may not be the best

True Fantasy Live Online

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: Level 5





Combat looks a little bit stilted from preview footage, but the vast menagerie is lovingly cel-shaded, and if you get bored there's always tree-chopping, shopkeeping or even cooking

Anubis: Zone of the Enders

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house





Understood to be developed by a different team to that of the original, gameplay for this ambitious sequel remains largely identical, save for small touches such as a close combat sword

Mr Driller Drill Land

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Namco
Developer: In-house





Mr Driller turns up on Nintendo's console as a theme park, with each of the rides providing the content and ruleset for every one of the drilling adventures, injecting variety into the concept

Low Riders

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: PCCW Japan
Developer: In-house





A rhythm action game based on the hydraulic excesses of American low riding street culture. Make the car dance to the beat in a variety of game modes, create your own paint job, etc

Battle Engine Aquila

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Infogrames
Developer: Lost Toys





A quick go on recent code failed to reveal any nasty surprises in terms of gameplay, with every element seemingly in place. Expect a more in-depth work-in-progress evaluation next month

BC

Format: Xbox, PC
Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: Intrepid





While at X02 (see p10–11), Peter Molyneux mainly talked about just two things and *BC* is one of them. Very little of the game was actually shown, but it's all sounding rather exciting

Fable

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: Big Blue Box





The other thing Molyneux talked about, *Fable* (previously *Project Ego*) sounds and looks fabulous with some remarkable environments promised. This really could be 'really, really cool'

Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb

Format: Xbox, PS2, PC
Publisher: Activision
Developer: LucasArts/The Collective





A new thirdperson action adventure outing for (still) the world's best known archeologist is nearing completion. Indy can now fight hand to hand and use nearby objects as weapons

Lamborghini

Format: Xbox, PS2, GC
Publisher: Rage
Developer: In-house





At X02 the Xbox version included an impressive physical damage model. The handling dynamic was great, though control felt a little bit too nervous for **Edge**'s liking. But there's still time

Whacked!

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: Presto Studios





One of the two games bundled with the Xbox Live pack (*MotoGP* is the other), *Whacked!*'s gameplay seems perfectly suited to multiplayer mayhem. But *Fuzion Frenzy* promised that too

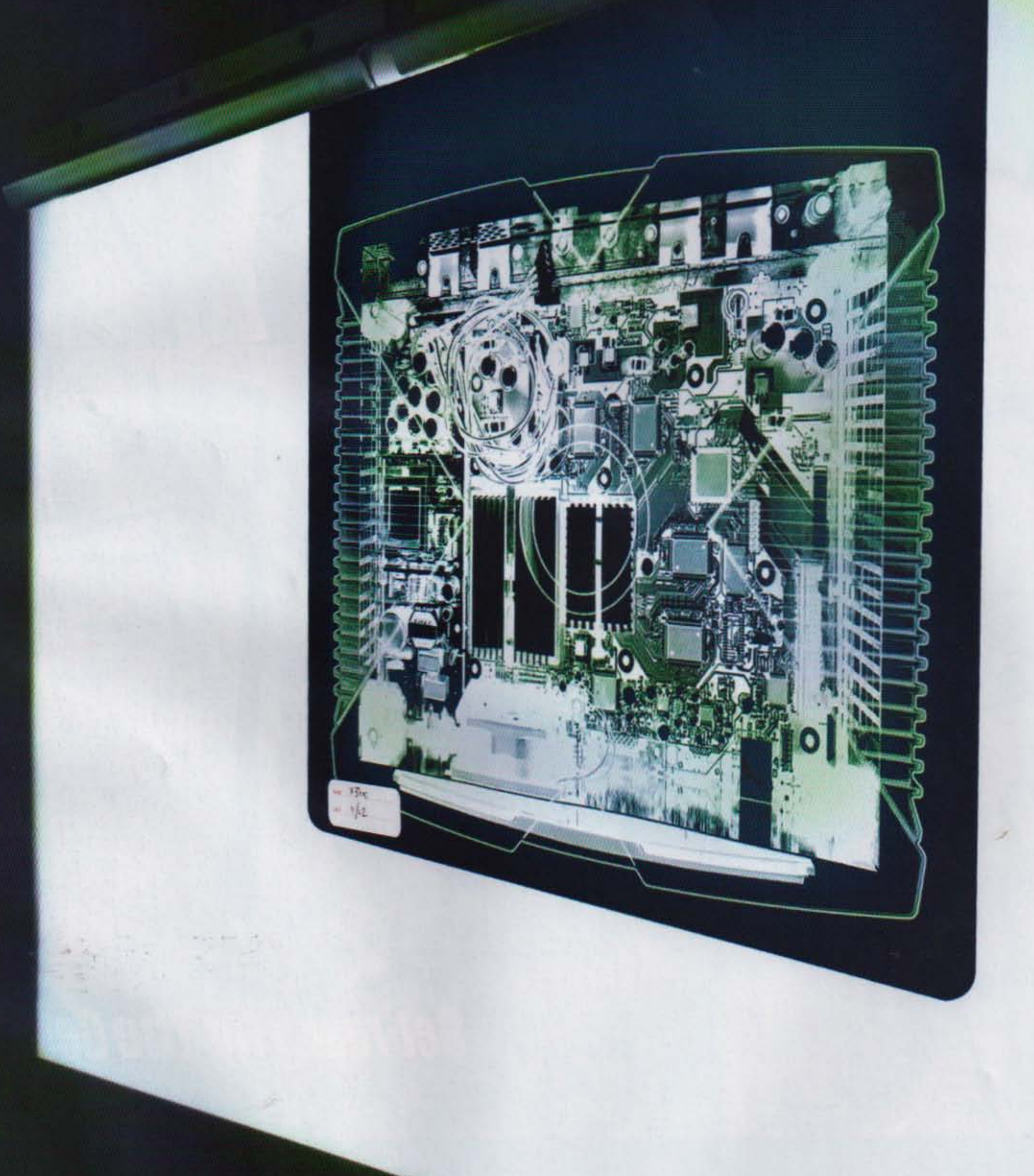
James Bond 007 in... NightFire

Format: PS2, Xbox, GC, PC
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Eurocom, Gearbox Software (PC version)





Unfortunately this currently resembles *Agent Under Fire* rather than *GoldenEye*, which means you can probably expect an average experience rather than an outstanding one. Shame really



Ex-box?

It was built to impress, it was built to last. But so far, Xbox has failed to make a worldwide impact. Are the problems with Xbox terminal, or does Microsoft have a master plan to save its console from a fate worse than Dreamcast?

It has some of the most diverse, groundbreaking and enthralling software of any format. Developers love it. Converts worship it. And what's more, it's Internet ready. But the Dreamcast failed to win the hearts and minds of the general consumer. Just one year on from its own launch, people are muttering much the same about the Xbox. But after hitting the floor crawling, the future of Xbox is still up in the air. The general consumer is still puzzled about Microsoft's black box. What can it do? How does it compare to that Sony machine? And more importantly, where is it going?

And there's some urgency here because some believe that Microsoft has one Christmas to get it right. In Europe, where knee-jerk price cuts and underwhelming marketing have done little for the cause, the console seems in jeopardy. When the Dreamcast failed to shift any sizeable numbers over the crucial Christmas of 2000, it was game over for the plucky machine. Consumer confidence waned and publishers began to get cold feet. Just a year later, Sega gave up the dream forever.

For Microsoft there's some uncanny symmetry. Sega's machine was marketed on the back of an online dream, "Play up to six billion players," screamed the ads, before they were subsequently jettisoned for breaching ITC standards. *Chu Chu Rocket*, the Dreamcast's first online game, didn't arrive until six months after the machine's launch, and few other titles arrived until a


Photography: Martin Thompson







year later. Similarly Microsoft is pinning a lot of hopes on its online strategy. And while the big black box is broadband enabled, Microsoft needed a full year before it was ready to launch Xbox Live in the US. The upshot of its online ambitions have yet to be played out, but already there are concerns that Xbox Live is not going to attract the number of consumers Microsoft that anticipates. "Microsoft revealed its PC mentality with the ethernet card and hard drive," points out **Steven L Kent**, author of 'The First Quarter'. "But in the United States it [Xbox Live] will not have an impact for another two years."

Back in 2000, **Edge** vividly remembers getting calls from members of the development community. The news was grim. Dreamcast games were slowly being removed from the portfolios of publishers, whatever stage of development they had reached. The calls have started to come in again, only this time for Xbox. No one is willing to go on record, but it's no secret that some big-name publishers have canned Xbox games recently. There's nothing like the exodus that happened at the turn of the century on Dreamcast, but the signs are familiar.

But are these comparisons really valid? And will the size of Bill Gates' wallet make a nonsense out of such omens. **Nick Gibson** of Durlacher certainly thinks so. "Unlike Sega, Microsoft has a rock solid and cash-laden balance sheet to draw upon. It can afford to use the Xbox as a learning experience in preparation for the next console cycle during which, with enlarged and improved development resources, a better understanding of the market and early hardware release timing, it intends to become a more effective competitor to Sony."

It's a view shared by many prominent industry figures **Edge** spoke to. The difficulty of assessing Microsoft's current position is that the picture looks so different in each part of the world. It's time to take stock. Much like Microsoft, we need to take a step back and evaluate the situation from all perspectives.

The American dream

The Xbox is doing impressive numbers on home turf. At the time of writing, Xbox is ahead of GameCube with sales approaching the 4m mark. The numbers underline a cultural truth: American's love big, powerful machines. After reasonable post-launch sales, a price drop of $100 in May 2002 really caught the attention of US consumers and in a country where broadband is widely used, Xbox Live has a better chance of prosperity.

The only major grumblings coming out of the US is from EA. In an article for the 'Boston Globe', EA's vice president of corporate communications, **Jeff Brown**, was unimpressed by Microsoft's decision to hold absolute control over Xbox Live's billing and infrastructure. "Sending your customer to a closed system is kind of like letting your girlfriend sleep over at your best friend's house," he commented. "You know you should trust them, but it still makes you nervous." EA's *Madden NFL 2003* will be online for PS2 owners only and turning a cold-shoulder to Microsoft is a major blow for Xbox Live. Despite this, reports suggest that the Xbox is thriving in the States and has none of the brand identity problems it has encountered elsewhere.

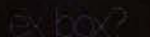
Mark Rein, vice president of Epic Games, best summarises US sentiment to the Xbox, "The most exciting thing is Xbox Live. You just plug it in and it works and you get the voice communicator for all Xbox Live games… I hope EA comes around and realises that Xbox Live is the best console online experience and it could sell more copies of its games by supporting it rather than ignoring it. I think it's leaving money on the table and creating opportunities for Sega and Microsoft to pick up where EA Sports has dropped the ball."

"Some big-name publishers have canned Xbox games. There's nothing like the exodus that happened on Dreamcast, but the signs are familiar"

Not big in Japan

Microsoft never expected Japan to be an easy market to break, but it couldn't have feared a worse start. Many shops in Akihabara just aren't stocking the machine that one Japanese retailer famously called a "coffee table." To the Japanese, the Xbox is just a western curiosity, and a huge one at that.

Although Microsoft put great effort into wooing Japanese publishers initially, it didn't fully comprehend Japanese business etiquette, and failed to follow through with the sort of long-term business relationship that Japanese companies expect. After securing around 80 developers, including Tecmo, Sega, Capcom, Koei, Namco and From Software, there's been some fallout in recent months. CESA (the Computer Entertainment Software Association) believes that of those 80 developers, only 50 remain committed to the Xbox. But more significant is Konami's decision to pull out of





Xbox Live

The language coming out of Microsoft is loud and clear: Xbox Live will revolutionise gaming. Naysayers, however, have expressed major doubts about the scheme. Are massive numbers of home console gamers ready to go online to duel with faceless opponents, while incurring the extra costs involved? While it's conceivable that a significant proportion of dedicated gamers will be eager to sample broadband-enabled multiplayer games, just how pervasive will this medium become? Probably fewer than the 10m subscribers Microsoft anticipate by 2007.

Again, the picture in the US is different from that in other territories. "I like a lot of what Microsoft is offering with Xbox Live," enthuses Randy Pitchford, president of Gearbox Software. "I like knowing for certain that every Xbox Live player has a headset. I like knowing that every Xbox Live player has a broadband connection. I like knowing that every Xbox Live player has a hard drive for me to give them free content after launch." With the exception of EA (admittedly, a big exception), the US developers **Edge** spoke to are universally upbeat about Xbox Live's prospects.

The picture in Europe is very different. While the rollout of broadband has gathered pace recently, approximately only four per cent of homes in the UK take advantage of the services. **Glen O'Connell**, director of communications at Rage, expresses the general note of caution. "We want to ensure there is a suitable business case for making online content, because the days of developers and publishers making online content for 'charity' are long gone. What Xbox Live does do well is allow a games publisher like Rage to compete directly with the likes of EA without the vast expense of setting up dedicated servers."

While there's a buzz surrounding Xbox Live on the eve of the service's launch, too many questions remain unanswered, not least by Microsoft itself. **Edge**, however, commends the brave endeavour and certainly hopes Xbox Live encourages developers to come up with innovative game designs.

Xbox development. Although *Metal Gear Solid Substance* is still being considered for a Japanese release, it will be the last Konami title on the console.

Among other things, Microsoft's poor support structure has been blamed. In particular, bug reports have to be translated from one language to another, causing long delays, not to mention intense irritation. The lack of DirectX familiarity among Japanese coders has also done little to endear the machine to programmers in the east.

"The marketing and launch of Xbox in Japan wasn't good," comments **Koji Aizawa**, editor of 'Famitsu-Xbox'. "Also, Microsoft's response to retailers and gamers over the trouble with scratched disks was poor. But the company's position in Japan is changing day by day. The Microsoft booth at this year's Tokyo Game Show was the best in the show. But is it enough?"

On a more positive note, Tecmo has bucked the trend and by all accounts is making money from the Xbox's most popular title, *Dead or Alive 3*. And there's appetising software coming through – the sort of games that stimulate Japanese palates. Pre-orders for *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball*, *Panzer Dragoon Orta* and *Tekki* are strong. The content even stronger.

Microsoft is far from dead in the east. It's presence at TGS was impressive (the demo disk alone, complete with playable *O.TO.GI*, *Panzer Dragoon Orta*, *Crimson Sea* and *Blinx* put all Sony promos to shame) and a rumoured rebranding exercise (possibly in collaboration with Sega) shows that Microsoft is aware of the problems. But will a cuter version of the Xbox just be too little too late?

Europe is a big headache for any foreign company. While Japan and the US lead the way in terms of cultural relevance, not to mention sheer financial clout, Europe is a curious territory. So many different languages, so many different tastes, it's understandable why the region gets foreign financial strategists in a flap. Always complaining that they are the last to receive any consideration, Europeans do, nevertheless, buy into anything that smacks of The New.



European union

In fairness to Microsoft, its European strategy was always a high priority from day one. Which doesn't mean to say that it was right. At X02 Sandy Duncan made the most public comments to date that strategical mistakes had been made. The launch price was a disaster, the subsequent knee-jerk cuts an obvious attempt to stimulate sales. At €250 (£158) the Xbox has finally become competitive, but it smacks of a company desperate to be loved. More to the point, there's still a feeling among massmarket consumers that the Xbox has as much credibility as the present Conservative Party. "First impressions last," cautions an anonymous producer at a large UK developer. "The public, at least in Europe, see the Xbox as an over-sized, over-priced Yank tank of a machine that is failing to generate any interest in the Japanese whatsoever, and is therefore in no way cool. In this brand-driven market, you have to be cool, and Xbox has already blown its image. Clawing it back is going to be a long, expensive climb."

In terms of pure sales figures, the Xbox is only slightly behind the GameCube. But there's hardly anything in it. Significantly, however, the Xbox is commanding impressive shelf space in most stores that **Edge** has visited. A factor influenced by Microsoft's drive to get as many demo pods and POS into retail outlets as possible. Clearly, Virgin, GAME and HMV believe that there's plenty of potential in the machine for doing well over the festive season. Sales could also be enhanced by Christmas marketing that includes a *Blinx*/McDonald's promotion and the (possible) sighting of Xbox consoles in the two 'Pop Rivals' houses, alongside more traditional TV ads.

The response **Edge** has received from European developers has also been positive. Although the public are turned off by Microsoft's image, developers and publishers have faith in the company's ambitions. In this respect, the Xbox and the Dreamcast couldn't be further apart. Faced with this new ailing newborn, publishers are much happier to hang in and see if it develops into a spirited adolescent.

Microsoft has scaled back ambitious schemes before – its ventures into cable and

interactive television have been particularly costly – and the Xbox is part of a much wider philosophy, namely the dominance of the home hub. Its evangelising of Xbox Live is not merely a short-term method of increasing sales, but a fundamental part of its quest to have a consumer device in every living room capable of receiving carefully targeted downloadable content. Microsoft sees broadband communication as the fastest way to expand its mindshare and Xbox is merely the beginning.

The other feather in Microsoft's cap is the recent acquisition of Rare. It is important for two reasons. Firstly, Rare has a track record of producing excellent games that can appeal to a broad audience. Secondly, the purchase – that came in at a whopping $375m (£240) – sends a clear message to the development community that the Redmond collective is serious about making Xbox work, whatever the cost. The value of the deal will be measured over five years, rather than the next two or three and, evidently, it was done with Xbox 2 in mind as much as Xbox.

However, Rare's recent output has lacked the verve and commercial clout evident in titles such as *Donkey Kong Country* and *GoldenEye*. Whether *Kameo* will prove as popular as earlier Rare titles will be interesting to see (see X02 news, p10-11). Microsoft must also ensure that talent doesn't leak away from the Twycross-based developer over the next two years.

Power of X

But if there's one thing that separates the Xbox from its competitors, it's sheer power. Although underspecced by current PC standards, the Xbox is easily the most versatile and developer-friendly console on the market. To some the balance is already beginning to shift. Cross-platform games have, so far, been pretty lazy exercises. You only have to look at *Turok Evolution* for evidence of that.

But developers are beginning to shift the focus. "More and more publishers are finding themselves with hard decisions to make about sacrificing visual fidelity to reach the lesser platforms (PS2 and GameCube)," believes **Randy Pitchfork**, president of Gearbox Software. "As a US developer, it appears to me that the Xbox is very successful – much more so than I would've bet prior to launch. Xbox is easier to develop for and it's more powerful. It's very difficult to maintain parity between the sexy Xbox showcase version and the lesser platforms."

Jeremy Longley, director of Lost Toys, also believes this to be a key factor in Xbox's survival chances. "One growing trend at the moment is for people to be releasing games on both Xbox and PS2 and, in general, the Xbox versions of these games are noticeably better, particularly in framerate and texture resolution terms. The consumer is growing aware that the Xbox is a technically more proficient platform, even if they're not running to buy the current version of the console. I think this bodes well for Microsoft for the next battle in 2005, or whenever."

At present, Microsoft is failing to answer tough questions about its failure to woo Japanese gamers, preferring instead to release figures suggesting it can survive on US and European goodwill alone. But Japan is still the hub of videogame development and if the lull continues, financial institutions, the publishing community and gamers themselves will begin to wonder about the Xbox's long-term hopes. To say Microsoft's own attempt to win over Japanese consumers with *Nezmix* was misguided would be generous at best.

The Xbox will not die from a lack of support like the Dreamcast did, but Microsoft's first console is hardly the commercial giant some anticipated. In April 2002 Microsoft revised its sales targets from 4m to 3.5m Xbox units for the year, compared with previous estimates of 4.5m-6m. It can't be much fun for those sitting in the offices in Redmond when they get the weekly retail reports, showing Nintendo is matching them box for box. Interestingly, pundits suggest that the key to Microsoft's future hopes lays firmly at the door of Nintendo. While industry insiders are already speculating about Sony and Microsoft's next hardware, there's less confidence that Nintendo will stay in the race.

Owain Bennallack, editor of 'Develop' magazine, believes that Microsoft needs to challenge one competitor at a time. "Just as Microsoft's pre-launch cheerleaders desperately needed a bottle of downers to bring them back to earth, so today's doom-mongers need to sit down and think. Why is Microsoft making Xbox? Why is it buying Rare for $375m if it's all on a whim? That's an awful lot of profit it has to make back to indulge a whim. The machine isn't going to outpace PS2 – it won't even get halfway there. But the GameCube's second place still remains up for grabs outside of Japan."

The Kyoto toy company is the real key to the future of Xbox. It's too early to say if Nintendo will pull out of hardware development after GameCube, but you can guarantee Microsoft will be doing its utmost to bully it from entering the next round of console wars. Nintendo has proved that it can adapt whatever the market conditions. An end to hardware development would not be game over for Nintendo, just a new beginning. Microsoft, on the other hand, is prepared to lose millions of dollars in the hope that it sees profits later in the decade. If it comes down to who's willing to go all in for the second place prize then Microsoft certainly has more chips on the table. With Nintendo removed Microsoft would then have a fighting chance of achieving some kind of parity with Sony.

"Make no mistake, Microsoft is in this for the long haul. It just needs to convince consumers that the Xbox has content to rival that on PS2"

Make no mistake, Microsoft is in this for the long haul. It just needs to convince consumers that the Xbox has content to rival that on PS2. Whatever the outcome, expect the Xbox to go down in history as one of the most expensive learning tools ever conceived. **E**



Continued >

Broken promises

Microsoft's failure to deliver on key promises has certainly been a factor in the poor reception of the console in Europe and Japan. Although there were marginally more games at launch than for either PS2 or GameCube, failure to follow through with an anticipated flow of titles – and quality ones at that – has hindered takeup of the machine. Japanese companies have also complained of Microsoft's ability to maintain strong business ties once deals have been struck.

In terms of tech specs, the graphics processor was reduced from 300MHz to 250MHz and the polygon performance came down from 300m per second to 125m per second. It has also been noticeable that developers have failed to use the hard drive in the radical new ways the Redmond company suggested when Xbox was first announced. But ludicrously – and presumably to keep the focus on Xbox as games machine – the DVD playback is only useable to those who bother to buy a remote control unit at extra cost.

However, the most brutal shot in the foot has been over its promise to deliver gaming unfettered by regional lockout. No game has yet to take advantage of this feature, leading to speculation that it was dropped soon after negotiations with publishers began. Predictably, Microsoft declined to comment on this aspect, but it's hard not to attribute some of the Xbox mod-chipping frenzy to this climbdown.





Richard Teversham
head of UK Xbox marketing

At XO2 Sandy Duncan, VP of Xbox Europe, made the most public announcement to date that errors were committed, especially in terms of the pricing of Xbox. So, is this a new, humble Microsoft with a realistic outlook? In the absence of anyone from the US arm of the company willing to talk, Edge spoke to Richard Teversham to see if Microsoft has a strategy to make the ills of the Xbox go away...

Business analysts have already suggested that the Xbox is failing and that Microsoft must now focus on a longer term strategy, including Xbox 2. How do you respond to this?

The launch of Xbox has been a great success despite the doubters. For those who said we could not make a console – we made an award-winning console. For those who said we could not make a good game – we made three million-sellers in less than a year. For those who said Xbox is the next Dreamcast – we are quite happy to prove them wrong.

It has been a rollercoaster of a launch around the world, and we have already learned a number of lessons. However, let's make it quite clear, Xbox is here and will be here to stay – for a very, very long time. Today all the indicators are in our favour; 1) 20 per cent market share in seven months; 2) number two console company; 3) market research showing Xbox unprompted awareness at higher levels than PS2; 4) Xbox is the most requested console for Christmas; 5) the number of exclusive and quality games releasing on Xbox is increasing week on week and, more importantly, gamers with dual consoles are shifting their purchasing to the Xbox games, as seen with *Turok*, *Hitman 2* and many other games; 6) Xbox Live is creating a huge amount of interest because it brings the next quantum leap in gameplay. We have always said that we are in for the long haul and this includes making Xbox a great success today.

Sony's huge market share, in every territory, must be daunting. Does Microsoft realistically expect to eat into this over the next five years? If so, how?

Xbox was launched less than a year ago and in that time we have had more highs than lows. To consider how successful Xbox is and will be, one needs to have a comparison point. On looking at the adoption in the first year of launch of a completely new format and technology, such as DVD and PSone, we can see the Xbox has performed extremely well with over 20 per cent market share in the UK in seven months. This in any market should be considered an amazing success especially with the kind of competition Xbox is up against.

The key strategies we have put in place to succeed today will continue into the future. So far we have included establishing a strong brand that people know about, which has been achieved. Bringing out a stronger line-up than the competition, which if you compare it to the competitors line-up at the same stage in their lifecycle, we have out-performed them. Bringing innovation into the gaming market which is seen through what developers can do on Xbox, plus the fact that Xbox Live blows away any plans from the competition.

If you look forward to the advent of the next versions of the consoles, by the time the competition catch up with the innovation of Xbox, Microsoft will already have a large number of people playing on Xbox Live and more encompassing games. The whole dynamic of the industry will change. Today Xbox is in the lead if you look at broadband-capable consoles – Xbox way over 4m, PS2 – 0, GameCube – 0. So the success today is about bringing innovation to the market, as it will be medium and long term.

There's no skirting around the fact that the Xbox has performed badly in Japan. Why do you think this is, and what can you do to improve matters? Is the rumoured collaboration with Sega the only way forward?

In Japan, there are dedicated staff of over 200 people working exclusively on Xbox, and there is powerful development support of Xbox from Japan-based houses such as Capcom, Sega and Konami. We are committed to building the business in Japan and are working hard to develop great games that Japanese gamers are excited about. Robbie Bach said at E3 that we always said Japan would be hard and guess what – it is. However gamers around the world embrace innovation and Xbox is the only console giving innovation today and is set up to deliver innovation tomorrow. From a standing start Xbox is a reality, and is here to stay.

It's no secret that key publishers are already pulling out of Xbox development. How can you entice them back?

The key developers and publishers are increasing their focus on Xbox as they see the momentum build massively coming into the Christmas period. With Xbox in the number two console position and the investments being made by Microsoft this should demonstrate that Xbox is here for the short, medium and long term. The signs are all positive with sales increasing worldwide week on week, more games coming to the market and an obvious shift in sales from PS2 to Xbox on multiformat games. So to give the market even more confidence is the fact that Xbox has not even had its first Christmas in Europe, the power of the Xbox has not been fully utilised and the dream of Xbox Live has become a reality. So with the install base increasing, the line-up better than the competition and Xbox Live – the only true online service in Europe – I would suggest that this is a formula for success.

There's a perception that Microsoft is always one step behind Sony when it comes to marketing savvy, ie the price reductions have been reactive steps. What publicity/marketing infrastructure does Microsoft have in place and what campaigns can we expect in the near future?

The launch marketing in Europe was fresh, innovative and award winning. Today the unprompted brand awareness in our target audience is higher than the competition. The Xbox brand is recognised by gamers and non-gamers alike, and was awarded Super Brand status alongside such brands as Yo Sushi, Virgin, Mercedes Benz and Häagen-Dazs, and this was achieved in less than seven months. The brand advertising 'Life is Short' was leading edge, and although it was banned from TV, it introduced Xbox into the cultural psyche and the target audience really enjoyed the sentiment.

On top of brand we have focused on mass trialling of Xbox as seen with events such as the Xperience, where UK gamers were able to trial Xbox five months prior to launch. We believe that by putting Xbox in the gamers hands to make up their own mind is the best marketing we can do – from our research 95 per cent of people are more likely to buy Xbox after trialling it. So the two-pronged marketing approach of trial and magazine reviews to the committed gamer, and the brand advertising to the wider audience achieved all the communication objectives. We have now built a very positive base to launch our Christmas campaign focusing on driving the wider audience to purchase, focusing on the quality and quantity of games, key new exclusive franchises, plus the amazing value that Xbox is today.

What is Microsoft doing to ensure that Sony doesn't snap up all the most lucrative licences (such as *GTAIII*, *Tomb Raider*, etc.)?

Exclusive franchises are important to the success of a console. Microsoft has a multi-strand strategy to ensure it has not only secured exclusive titles but also the big cross-platform franchises for Xbox. Xbox exclusive game strategies include: 1) home-grown products such as *Halo 2*, *Project Gotham 2* and *Blinx*; 2) working with key developers such as Lionhead and Tecmo on Xbox exclusives that Microsoft publishes; 3) new developers joining Microsoft, as seen in the Rare acquisition and 4) working with other publishers and developers to bring their exclusive content to Xbox as in *Splinter Cell* (Ubi Soft) and *Unreal Championship* (Infogrames) and 5) games that can only be played on Xbox due to the power of the console and opportunity of Xbox Live, such as *Steel Battalion* and *Perfect Dark*. We are confident that these key strategies will ensure that a large amount of exclusives and key titles come to Xbox.

Go figure:

Edge had hoped to compare like-for-like hardware sales figures from each key territory, but as **Simon Cox**, editor of 'Xbox Nation', pointed out, "Real US sales figures for Xbox are as elusive as Osama Bin Laden." However, evidence does suggest that Microsoft is well on its way to selling an impressive 4m units in the US alone. Figures coming from the UK and Japan paint a decidedly different picture.

Japan (2002 figures only):

Format:	W/E September 22	W/E September 29	Total
PlayStation2	43,666	43,675	2,901,658
GameCube	12,784	15,240	667, 052
Xbox	2,473	2,125	278, 860

UK (approximate):

Format:	Weekly	Total
PlayStation2	22,000	2,750,000
GameCube	5,000	280,000
Xbox	5,000	280,000

Industry opinion

Edge canvassed the views of some industry luminaries to get their thoughts on the fate of Xbox. Most, as you will discover, are positive about Microsoft's long-term prospects…

The most depressing thing has to be the lack of Japanese madness style games. Where PS2 and particularly Nintendo excel is in those type of titles. I was a big fan of the Dreamcast which also had loads of 'em – who can forget *Chu Chu Rocket* – and while old ones may rear their pixels on next-gen consoles, it's not the same. That said, I think that Xbox is creating a market for itself anyway with its muscle games.
Emily Newton-Dunn, director, Young Casual Element Ltd

I don't get the Rare-thing; *Kameo* looks drastically dull, another *Jet Force Gemini*. There's a diversity and scope to the PS2 line-up that is entirely commendable and very attractive, it says things about the company and its product (see *Frequency*, *Fantavision*, *Freak Out*, *Rez*). Microsoft should stop, look and listen, because all I see right now are Americans making games for America – and that won't win the battle for Xbox 1, 2 or even 3.
Anonymous

I've never believed in the appeal of online console gaming, and that view hasn't changed any in the last few years. It's a fractional market, and limiting it to broadband users only is suicide. I'll be astonished beyond measure if Xbox Live takes off to any degree.
Stuart Campbell, veteran games journalist

I think Xbox can still survive, but not with the same approach it is doing now. For example, in the Czech Republic, it is nearly impossible to get Xbox and its games, but PS2 has total support in all the supermarkets and has its own specialised shops and magazines. No wonder that nobody wants Xbox here.
Jarek Kolar, team leader, Pterodon

If there is one single platform the publishers are pulling away from then it's Game Boy Advance. With Xbox now competitively priced and some genuinely good titles coming through into the market, the sales performance of the hardware should start to pick up substantially and we don't think Microsoft would allow the Xbox to go the same way as Dreamcast. But to double check, it may be best to keep an eye on Arsenal's shirt sponsorship over the next few seasons.
Glen O'Connell, director of communications, Rage

I don't think Xbox compares with Dreamcast. Dreamcast was the first of a new generation of consoles: therefore it was lower technology than the others when they came out a little later. The Xbox will remain technologically cutting edge until the next generation, which is at least a few years off yet. In the meantime, its superior power can only become more and more apparent.
Richard Darling, game design director, Codemasters

That Rare purchase was expensive, but it brought instant credibility. It proved that Microsoft was serious when it pledged to spend $2bn. It got Microsoft access to a company that understands consoles. Bungie was a great purchase, but Bungie is a boutique publisher that only does one game per year at best. Rare is a workhorse and a hit maker. And Rare can be creative. Sure, *Banjo-Kong* looked an awful lot like *Donkey-Kazooie*, but we are also talking about the company that did *Battle Toads* and *Blast Corps*.
Steven L Kent, author of 'The First Quarter'

Microsoft will find it hard to recover in such a short period of time, but Japanese people like whatever is in fashion. So the Xbox could be selling explosively in an instant if the most famous titles begin to appear on Xbox exclusively. It needs games such as a *Final Fantasy VII* (PlayStation) or a *Smash Bros. Melee* (GameCube) to be successful.
Koji Aizawa, editor, 'Famitsu-Xbox'

I don't believe that anyone here seriously believes that Microsoft will ever present a serious challenge to Sony. What is far more likely is that as the PC market shrinks, and GameCube corners the kids' market, Xbox will be a stable second or joint-second contender. With Sony visibly growing the size of the market, everybody will do well, but it doesn't take a genius to figure that Sony will be the leader by a wide margin for years to come. Xbox 2, frankly, would have to come with a free X-Wing to seriously challenge the Sony dominance.
Simon Cox, editor, 'Xbox Nation' (US)

If the past is anything to go by, the corporation will learn from its mistakes, certain heads will roll, and the process will move forward. The battle is on to be the box which sits under, or exists as part of, the telly as the universal massmarket Tivo/Communicator/Entertainment system. This is round one and there's a long way to go.
John Cook, director of Bad Management

Microsoft always has a long-term strategy. There is an old cliché about Microsoft not getting it right until version 3 (look at Windows, Office, DirectX) and by its own standards, Xbox is far from 'failing', it's probably Microsoft's most successful version one ever. Xbox 2 isn't needed yet, they are far enough ahead of the competition already. That is, of course, unless Sony releases PS3 earlier than the seven years after PS2 that it planned. If Sony does release early, it'll show that at least one company thinks Xbox was too successful for comfort.
Glenn Corpes, director, Lost Toys

Clearly it can't make the platform, or any successor, work without EA and the other big publishers, but Microsoft has a hardware platform and an online strategy that shout "big clear vision to succeed." I think writing Microsoft off at this stage is short sighted.
Ian Baverstock, business development director, Kuju Entertainment

If Microsoft can redesign the machine by next Christmas and have something sexy to offer Japanese gamers, it's 50 per cent of the job done. But it has to find a common spirit behind the brand and the machine.
Gregory Szriftgiser, 'Joystick' magazine

Developer interest in the Xbox remains very strong as it is a good platform to work on and Microsoft's developer support is excellent, but publishers will simply not commission sufficient product to support the platform unless there is a reawakening of *public* interest – for this to happen Microsoft must learn from its mistakes with Xbox when launching Xbox 2.
Basil Barrett, operations director, Stainless Steel Games

The PlayStation2 sales numbers released recently by Sony indicate that Japan only makes up 27.4 per cent of total PlayStation2 sales whereas North America represents 42.48 per cent and Europe 30.12 per cent. So with 72.5 per cent of the console market outside of Japan I think Xbox can be successful regardless of what it does or doesn't do there.
Mark Rein, vice president, Epic Games

The most exciting thing about Xbox is that the hardware is capable of such great games, and the depressing fact is that they aren't out yet.
Mike Merren, director of development, Crawfish

I find three things depressing: the size of the Xbox (but that's just my preference for cool-looking hardware); the controller, which plays well, but feels and looks cheap; and, lastly, that Microsoft can't cost-reduce it fast enough to make good money on this round of hardware. I find it exciting that the couple of top-selling Xbox games are really great, for example *Halo*.
Andrew Bennett, executive producer, Crystal Dynamics

Six of the best

The Xbox may have more grunt than either PS2 or GameCube, but to consumers such considerations are meaningless. A console sells because of its content, and due to a lack of high-profile exclusive titles Microsoft's machine has failed to make an impact with mainstream gamers. Hopefully, the following games should provide a more convincing argument to buy into Xbox, especially for Japanese consumers…



O.TO.GI

From Software turns from big robots to Japanese fairytales, and with stunning results if the Tokyo Game Show demo is anything to go by. Probably not enough on its own to generate sales of the console, but certainly one of the growing number of AAA titles.



Panzer Dragoon Orta

Another simplistic but enjoyable and thrilling Xbox title from Japan, *Panzer Dragoon* won't hold many surprises for anyone who has played the first two Sega Saturn titles, but it updates the pyrotechnic hallmarks of the series with panache.



True Fantasy Star Online

If nothing else, this will provide the definitive answer to the question, posed at Edge Live some time ago of who wants to be the cook. And shopkeeper, lumberjack, adventurer, fisherman, and all wrapped up in a gloriously lustrous cel-shaded exterior.



Halo 2

Still the most compelling reason to buy an Xbox, *Halo* has, however, failed to woo the mainstream. The sequel is unlikely to change that, but the prospect of online multiplayer *Halo 2* is exciting for fans, and a rallying cry for Xbox Live developers.



Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball

A game to wax lyrical over, *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* is likely to be the closest videogames have come to soft porn. No one's sure what the gameplay is going to be like, and if Japanese game mags are anything to go by, no one cares.



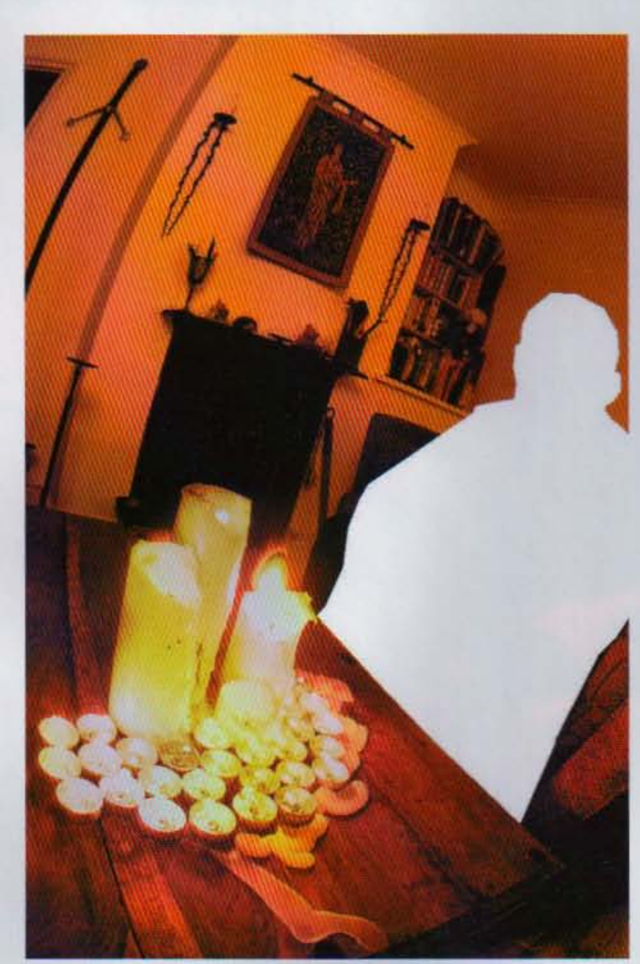
Crimson Sea

Maintaining many of the features that have earned Koei a rightfully impressive reputation in Japan, *Crimson Sea* is yet another simple but effective title to appear on Xbox – though it has to be said that the game's commercial appeal is difficult to determine.

living the vida coder



Photography: **Martin Thompson**

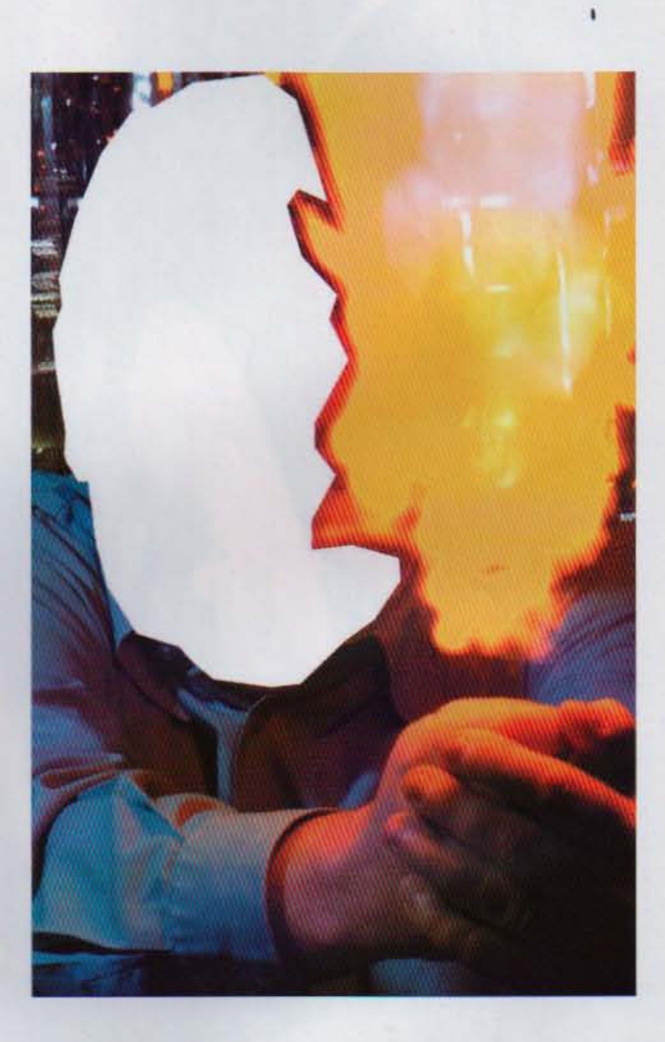




What do game developers do when they're not developing videogames? **Edge** pries into the private lives of eleven industry figures. And makes some weird discoveries...







Here's the stereotype: development staff work 16 hours a day, every day, go home, slump in front of state-of-the-art entertainment systems, watch cult sci-fi, then go to bed. We thought: there must be more to it than this. The dark, twisted ideas behind *Deus Ex, Oddworld* and *Project Ego* surely don't come from lounging about on slack-sprung sofa beds every night watching 'Farscape' and slurping Super Noodles. At the same time, there must be a few people in this industry who get better exercise than lifting a multi-function remote controller. Sure enough, it didn't take much poking around to confirm **Edge**'s suspicions. And yet, of course, there often remains something unnervingly dark and obsessive about the game development mind. Remember that the next time you fire off a vitriolic complaint to one of their Websites...

continued



Jason Kingsley

CEO – Rebellion – polo

The accepted image of a polo player – aristocratic, fit, glamorous – is about as far from videogame stereotype as is humanly possible, so the discovery of a polo-playing developer was something of a coup. **Jason Kingsley** has been riding horses competitively since the age of 11, trotting through the international show-jumping circuit as a child and then captaining the British student riding team while at Oxford University. Post-uni, Kingsley began to miss horseback competition and decided to give polo a crack. "Obviously the riding bit was easy," he says, "but the hitting the ball with a 52-inch mallet bit, that's hard enough on your own two feet let alone on the back of a horse moving at 30 miles an hour." Polo teams consist of four players, two in attack, two in defence – Kingsley plays in the former, usually at the Kirtlington polo grounds in Oxfordshire. Obviously, **Edge** wanted to know if he'd ever played against royalty, or at least Jodie Kidd. Sadly, he insists on being discreet, "I've played with a wide range of people from a whole set of different backgrounds, and sometimes you don't recognise who it is against you, behind the face mask, until after the game… I can't name any names, but it surprised me." As for finding connections between videogames and polo, well, there is some crossover motivation – Kingsley cites "fast action, a bit of aggression, good company and the occasional great party" as his reasons for loving polo. Sounds just like the LAN gaming scene. Apart from the good company and great party bits, of course.

Suggested materials:

Events – Hurlingham Polo Association organises the Cartier International Polo Day every July where various members of the nobility compete for charity, while 'Hello!' snappers take pictures of posh girls in expensive dresses

Website – the HPA Website (www.hpa-polo.co.uk/) has links to various online polo news sites

Books – Hugh Dawnay – 'Polo Vision' (JA Allen) – a proper instruction manual
Jilly Cooper – 'Polo' (Corgi) – not a proper instruction manual





Andy Bastable

senior programmer – Codemasters – Christian youth worker

In his book 'Lost Icons: Reflections on Cultural Bereavement', the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, makes a high-profile attack on videogames for harming the minds of children. Perhaps he should have a chat with **Andy Bastable**, senior programmer on Codemasters' forthcoming *Club Football* and, for the last year and a half, a committed Christian who spends two hours every Friday night running a youth group for local children. Bastable admits that before his conversion, this time would have been spent pursuing the standard male favourites of women and alcohol but he started to become alienated with, and isolated by, that lifestyle. "During one particularly stressful time where I wasn't sure whether I wanted to move away back down south, I remember praying for the first time since I was very young. I ended up deciding to stay at Codemasters, and the very next day my friend and former colleague Tom Di Giovanni invited me along to his Bible group."

It can't be easy adopting a Christian lifestyle in a technology-obsessed industry where the usual gods are high poly counts and mega-buck film licences. As he points out, "The biggest challenge has been watching my friends and colleagues' reaction to my faith. Many have seen the cocky, confident lad who used to go out too much change into someone who is less volatile and who values other things more. For some, it has been hard to take in, although hopefully they have seen the fact that I am happier now than I have ever been in my life. I am always learning how to approach friends and colleagues with what I believe in – some are happy for me to talk to them about that aspect of my life, others can be stand-offish, and others insulted by even the tiniest mention." Whatever objections he's faced, there is a determination to spread the philanthropic message at work, "I recently formed a link between Codemasters and a local charity, CORD, which enables us to donate our loose change to help developing countries in Africa."

As for the corrupting influence of gaming, Bastable is refreshingly open-minded. "I personally don't see videogames as the root cause of the problems in our society. I think the parents should take some flak," he suggests. "Yes, there are some games that I do have issues with, and I don't think kids should be playing them, but they are clearly marked as such and I think more should be done to stop children getting access to them. For most reasonable people it's hard to see the link between picking off the digital representation of one of your mates with a sniper rifle from 500 yards (knowing full well that he'll be spawned again in a few seconds) and causing them harm in real life." Perhaps it's time for the first Christian FPS – the first commandment being, "Thou shalt not camp next to weapon respawn points."

Suggested materials:

Course – most local churches run courses and there is a national Website where people can find out more (www.alphacourse.org)

Website – for those interested in finding out more about who Jesus was, visit www.rejesus.co.uk

Books – CS Lewis – 'Mere Christianity' (HarperCollins)
Gregory A Boyd – 'Letters from a Skeptic' (Victor Books)
Frank Morison – 'Who moved the Stone?' (Faber and Faber)
The Bible, especially: John 3: 16, Matthew 11: 28–30



Dene Carter

co-founder – Big Blue Box – esoteric religion and occultism

If you were feeling particularly lazy, you'd refer to **Dene Carter** as a goth. He has the black clothes and the big army boots. He's also been known to frequent the goth nights at London's Limelight superclub, a converted church spread over three floors. But his "darker aesthetic", as he poetically puts it, doesn't come from reading Bram Stoker's 'Dracula' and taking it all just a bit too seriously. In his early teens, Carter's body started rejecting his internal organs. He was ill for six years, and virtually cut off from life. "It gave me a different perspective on things," he reflects. "Being out of it, left to stew in my own imagination. Most people go through a brooding resentful period when they're 15, 16, but at least they have people to bounce things off. During that period I was mostly isolated. It was an unpleasant time."

Carter started reading Ursula Le Guin's 'Earthsea' books (based around a young apprentice wizard – almost 30 years before Harry Potter), and became fascinated with the idea of magic. From fiction he progressed to various esoteric religions and belief systems. Take a look at the bookshelves in his living room and you'll find obscure tracts on paganism, Enochian magic and ancient Earth mysteries. This interest very obviously feeds into Carter's work, especially the complex magic system at the heart of *Project Ego* – which is partly based on a definition espoused by infamous occultist **Alistair Crowley**, "Magic is the art of affecting nature by application of the will."

Carter goes on to explain, "The whole reason I got into games was that I read Le Guin – that was the first time I was really introduced to the idea of wizards, and her magic system was actually quite detailed. As a child I was into Lego because you built worlds, you used your imagination to craft something. And the discovery of the idea of the medieval wizard or alchemist was incredibly compelling to me, because that was the archetype of the creator. Later, I got into computers because suddenly there was this wonderful medium which meant I could pretty much do whatever I wanted. And going from Lego to something in which you can take any aspect of real life and play around with the rules was incredibly compelling."

Some may see a paradox between an interest in defunct superstitions and making a living from the modern, logical world of computer programming, but Carter disagrees, "If you're an intelligent human being, you're questioning things all the time, trying to find underlying rules. I was convinced there must be something linking all these belief structures. Most of them rely on a very few core belief sets and the rest of it's just rubbish, dogma or whatever else. So I'm reading all this not because I believe in any particular one, it's more that I'm convinced that there must be an underlying logic to it and if I could tap into that, it would be very much like another form of programming."

This logic system, then: is he close to finding it? "Oh no. I'm not sure I ever will. I mean, you look at it, and it leads into things like quantum mechanics – and quantum physicists who say actually what goes on in the world, oddly enough, is very much affected by what you *want* to happen… you'll find bizarre shamanic traditions out in the Amazonian jungle will do the same thing… just using slightly different technology."

Suggested materials:

CDs – Various – 'Even Wolves Hid their Teeth' (Cold Meat Industry) – a good sampler from the Swedish label Cold Meat Industry

Ordo Equilibrio – 'Reaping the Fallen: The First Harvest of Life' (Cold Meat Industry) – excellent ritual noise/dark ambient

Dead Can Dance – 'Within the Realm of a Dying Sun' (4AD) – ageless, wonderful chillout for those of us who cheered the Ringwraiths and booed the Ewoks

Books – Brian Bates – 'The Way of Wyrd' (Century) – a very readable insight into Saxon shamanic magic

Migene Gonzalez-Wippler – 'The Complete Book of Spells, Ceremonies and Magic' (Llewellyn) – good, unbiased overview of most magical traditions

Journal – B Dunne, R Nelson and RG Jahn – 'Precognitive Remote Perception: Replication of Remote Viewing', 'Journal of Scientific Exploration', Vol. 10, No. 1, 1996



Kent Hudson and David Riegel

designers – Ion Storm – metal band

There's been a slight hiccup in the musical plans of *Deus Ex II* designer **Kent Hudson** and *Thief 2* equivalent **David Riegel**. Their metal band was on the verge of recording a few demos, perhaps even choosing a name, when the bass player, an electrician by trade, accidentally put a one-inch-diameter lightning-rod through his hand. It's an injury that would no doubt appeal to the band's list of influences – death metal noise terrorists such as Meshuggah, Amen, Candiria and Every Time I Die. When the group is fully functioning, Hudson sings ("It's really mostly screaming") and Riegel's on drums. The duo share songwriting duties – an activity Riegel likens to creating videogames, "I try to approach songwriting in the same way as design – balancing an analytical perspective with a creative one." Although it's likely that designing videogames involves rather less screaming into a microphone about descending into paranoid madness or vomiting dead gods from the stomach of Hell.

Suggested materials:

CDs – Meshuggah – 'Chaosphere or Nothing' (Nuclear Blast)

Amen – 'We Have Come for your Parents' (Virgin)

Candiria – '300 Percent Density' (Century Media)

Every Time I Die – 'Last Night in Town' (Ferret)







Chris Rowley

QA manager – Eidos – fantasy live action roleplaying

In a scout camp just outside Hemel Hempstead, 1,000 people are milling about dressed as elves, trolls, ogres and human warriors. They will stay here for three days, and apart from the catering vans and shower facilities, you'd think you had wandered onto the pages of a David Gemmil novel. This is Renewal, the fifth fantasy live action roleplaying event of the year organised by Curious Pastimes. And **Edge** wants to know what the hell is going on.

"In simple terms people are playing characters in a fantasy-based world," explains **Chris Rowley**. "But instead of it being videogame based, or a pen and pencil game, you actually play your character for real, with other people doing the same. The characters and monsters you meet during the game are played by other people, so it is a bit like free-form acting, as you have to maintain your characterisation throughout the entire game, and some games last for days at a time." The over-arching plot of these events is worked out in advance, with participants joining warring clans with specific roles. However, the fighting is to some extent 'real' – not every sword blow is choreographed. It sounds like a recipe for disaster. You wonder how many orcs end up in casualty.

Rowley got into this almost 20 years ago. "I started playing 'Dungeons & Dragons' after reading 'The Lord of the Rings'. After a few years of table-top roleplaying I saw an advert in 'White Dwarf' magazine back in 1982 about 'Live roleplaying' at a place called Treasure Trap just outside Chester. I went along for a weekend and was hooked." He now helps organise the Renewal events (visit www.curious.u-net.com for more info), and it turns out this has provided a valuable stream of market research for his day job. "The majority of live roleplayers are in the target market for RPGs, and I know that quite a lot of them play, so I get to see first hand what their expectations are and what type of plotlines work or don't work. From a job point of view, as I write plot, it has taught me a bit about motivating people and what makes them tick."

The Renewal season is over for 2002, but will begin again next March. **Edge** is already sharpening its broad sword.

Suggested materials:

Books – JRR Tolkien – 'The Lord of the Rings' trilogy (HarperCollins)
Robert Jordan – 'The Wheel of Time' series (Orbit)
DVDs – 'The Lord of the Rings, The Fellowship of the Ring' (New Line Cinema)
'Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone' (Warner Bros.)
Website – www.curious.u-net.com

Ian Livingstone

managing director – Eidos – Manchester City FC

Few people have managed to combine their jobs and pastimes as successfully as **Ian Livingstone**. First he turned his love of roleplaying games into the multimillion-selling 'Fighting Fantasy' books, then he managed to convince the Eidos board of directors that sponsoring Manchester City, an obsession of his since his father started taking him to games in the '50s, would be a really good idea. Even more amusing is the way the deal came about. "I met Ray Ranson [ex-City player] at a corporate sailing day, of all things," Livingstone relates. "After berating him for allowing Ricky Villa to dance around him in the 1981 Cup Final to score *that* goal, we started talking about City's problems at the time. It was 1998 and City were playing the likes of Macclesfield in Division Two. This was not much fun, but it was inevitable that City would be back. I'd heard that Brother had had enough and was ending its sponsorship after 13 years. I then met David Bernstein, City's chairman, and I made him an offer for a three-year sponsorship deal. It certainly wasn't a huge amount of money by footballing standards."

The sponsorship deal is now over (Livingstone calls it "the most cost-effective brand awareness campaign ever to be done in the history of the universe"), but the Eidos man is still a regular at Maine Road. His most memorable moments at the ground were watching midfield maestro Colin Bell – a sort of '70s version of David Beckham, but with even worse hair. He also reckons the team helped him through some tough times with the company. "Supporting City has certainly helped me to stay cheerful when things have not always being going well. The fans are the best in the world at smiling through adversity. Their unwavering loyalty and determination while not taking themselves too seriously are traits that I like to think I have." Well, he does work for the company that effectively paid $8m (£5.15m) for *Daikatana*. Now that was a Manchester City decision.

Suggested materials:

Books – Gary James – 'Manchester: the Greatest City' (Polar Print Group Ltd)
Websites – www.mcfc.co.uk, http://manchestercity.rivals.net/
DVDs – 'Manchester City – Champions – Back to the Premiership' (Fremantle Home Entertainment)





Alex Whittaker
senior AI programmer – Elixir – kendo

Alex Whittaker took up the martial art of Kendo ten years ago ("I realised that graduate alcohol and pie consumption did not go well with postgraduate sitting at a desk all day"). He is currently a first dan, or shodan, and enters about two competitions a year. It is a highly stylised discipline, "Kendo has evolved from real sword fighting and so in competitions, cuts are scored using a binary system. Either the cut would have killed the opponent stone dead or it doesn't count. In practice this means that the timing and spirit (zanshin) of a scoring cut has to be perfect, leaving the judges, your opponent and yourself convinced that that cut would have left him or her bleeding on the ground." Apparently, Whittaker keeps his kendo equipment at the Elixir office. Has he ever been tempted to use it there? "No more than once a day," he says.

Suggested materials:

Whittaker recommends his kendo club's Website (www.hizen.org) which has information on related books, CDs, FAQs, equipment and links

Ted Carron
freelance producer – Codemasters – exteme sports addict

It seems cheats *do* prosper. **Ted Carron** joined Codemasters 15 years ago and was co-inventor of the Game Genie – a multimillion selling cheat cart released for various consoles back in the early '90s. This success allowed Carron to drift into semi-retirement for three years at which point he took up skydiving, cave diving and cross country horse racing. Golf would have been the safer option. "Horse riding is the bad one. I've never actually broken anything because I wear a lot of body armour, but I fell on a gatepost once, and if I hadn't have been wearing the armour it would have killed me. I was in a bad way for quite a long time. There have been a few times when I've been in free fall and the parachute has been a little slow opening, which gets your attention very quickly. Normally a parachute opens in one and a half seconds and when you get to two you're already thinking about your life. I've been diving in caves in a flooded quarry in Wales with another guy from Codies, and we both had free-flows. That's when the valve gets locked open and your oxygen tank empties itself. All your air flows out in about a minute. We were about 100 feet down in this cave. We had alternative air supplies, but we were still wondering when these would give, due to the cold. After that, if another one had gone, we would have been sharing air, which would have put more demand on the valve. That was scary." To top it all, Carron is currently producing Codemasters' first MMRPG, *Dragon Empires*. However, he reckons the dangers he's faced with extreme sports have given him the necessary psychological credentials for the role. "It makes you scared of very little. I don't mind being responsible for a multimillion-pound budget. That's an extreme sport in itself really."

Suggested materials:

Magazine – 'Skydive' – The official magazine of the British parachute association (www.skydivemag.com)

Book – Bret Gilliam – 'Deep Diving: An Advanced Guide to Physiology, Procedures and Systems' (Watersport Publishing)

Lorne Lanning
president – Oddworld Inhabitants – skeleton collector

It started with fossils. In his early 20s, **Lorne Lanning** acquired "some relatively common pieces," a tooth from a prehistoric white shark, a mammoth's molar ("I'd hold these pieces in my hand and just enjoy the attempt at comprehending them"). From there, he moved on to the complete skeletons of contemporary species. The Oddworld Inhabitants founder now has about 24 skeletons, including snakes, a toad, a chicken, different species of lizard and a trigger fish. They are displayed in frames around his home.

His reason for collecting skeletons is part scientific curiosity, part aesthetic appreciation. But there's also a practical element, "At the time I started collecting, I was an animation/film student with a special interest in computer graphics. I wasn't interested in squash and stretch animation, I was interested in bringing new creatures to life and in animating them in a more realistic ways. I discovered that by studying skeletal structures I gained a great deal more insight into the movements and behaviours of most living things." Lanning is also convinced his interest has helped with game development, improving him as a designer, animator and director.

So where do these things come from? "Sometimes I'm lucky to find them in odd shops that we stumble upon while travelling," he explains. "I have a few favourite stores in New York and San Francisco. I also have some contacts on the Net that keep me posted on interesting pieces." At the moment, his favourite pieces are the chicken ("truly astounding to look at") and trigger fish ("pretty incredible, in an alien sort of way"), but he would love to get hold of a humming bird. **Edge** was interested in finding out whether Lanning has ever worked on the raw materials himself – finding a body, boiling the bones, that kind of thing. "I recently saw a crow fly into a powerline and watched as it fell dead into the road," he responds. "I took it home with me and gave it a place on the property. The bugs are still working on it and in the end it will probably take me a good nine months to go from full bird to perfect skeletal mount. I look forward to posing it in a very natural motion, like a single frame of animation that embodies the natural movement of the life from which it came." Well, we did ask…

Suggested materials:

"The Museum of Natural History in New York is incredible. The Peabody Museum in Connecticut is also excellent. I used to spend hours upon hours, wandering through the displays. It's a pretty cheap way to kill a day if you're a struggling student in such an expensive city. Aquariums are also great places to spot such biology. The Monterey Bay Aquarium in Monterey, California is one of my favourites.

"There are a few stores around the States that carry mounted skeletons. There is Maxilla and Mandible in uptown New York on Columbus Avenue and there is The Bone Store in San Francisco. Both great places."

Edge also recommends the Natural History Museum of London



Jez San

chief executive – Argonaut – magic

No industry bash is complete nowadays without **Jez San** pulling out a pack of cards and showing off some hugely impressive new trick. He got into magic as a kid, but when the family bought a TRS-80 in 1977 his attention turned to videogames. Twenty-four years later, after watching magician Derren Brown on TV, he dusted down the old magic books and started practising again. San freely admits to pretty much stalking Brown for a while to find out the secrets behind his repertoire, before discovering that he'd written a few books and even released lecture videos on the art of trickery. "I also befriended some other cool magicians, such as Ian Rowland, who literally wrote the book on how to be a psychic," says San (the book's called 'Cold Reading'). "I've visited the magic circle a few times and it's great to meet the wise old magicians. I even met Alan Alan having a crafty fag and he showed me the most amazing 'rising card' trick with my own deck of cards."

The first card trick he learned was 'Out of this World' by Paul Curry (every trick is given a name by its inventor) in which you "facilitate a spectator to separate an entire deck into red and black piles without looking at the cards." That's still one of his favourites, along with Ian Rowland's 'Sense of Touch' magic system, "where, just by touching the faces of face-down cards, you can tell people what colour they are." San reckons he spends about five to ten hours a week learning new tricks, most of which he picks up on magic newsgroups or via books, videos and lectures. You won't find him hanging out at the big Las Vegas shows, though. "I was never inspired by American stage magicians such as Siegfried and Roy, or David Copperfield," he says. "Even from a young age I knew how every trick was done. There are only so many ways to make an elephant disappear." How true.

Suggested materials:

Books – Derren Brown – 'Pure Effect, Absolute Magick' (www.derrenbrown.co.uk)
Ian Rowland – 'The Art of Cold Reading' and 'Sense of Touch' (www.ian-rowland.com)
Websites – www.themagiccafe.com, www.alakazam.co.uk, www.magicsmith.com, www.jbtv.co.uk
Yahoo groups – theEye (yahoo.com), and MentalistsAsylum (yahoo.co.uk)









Aaryn Flynn

programmer – BioWare – adventure racing

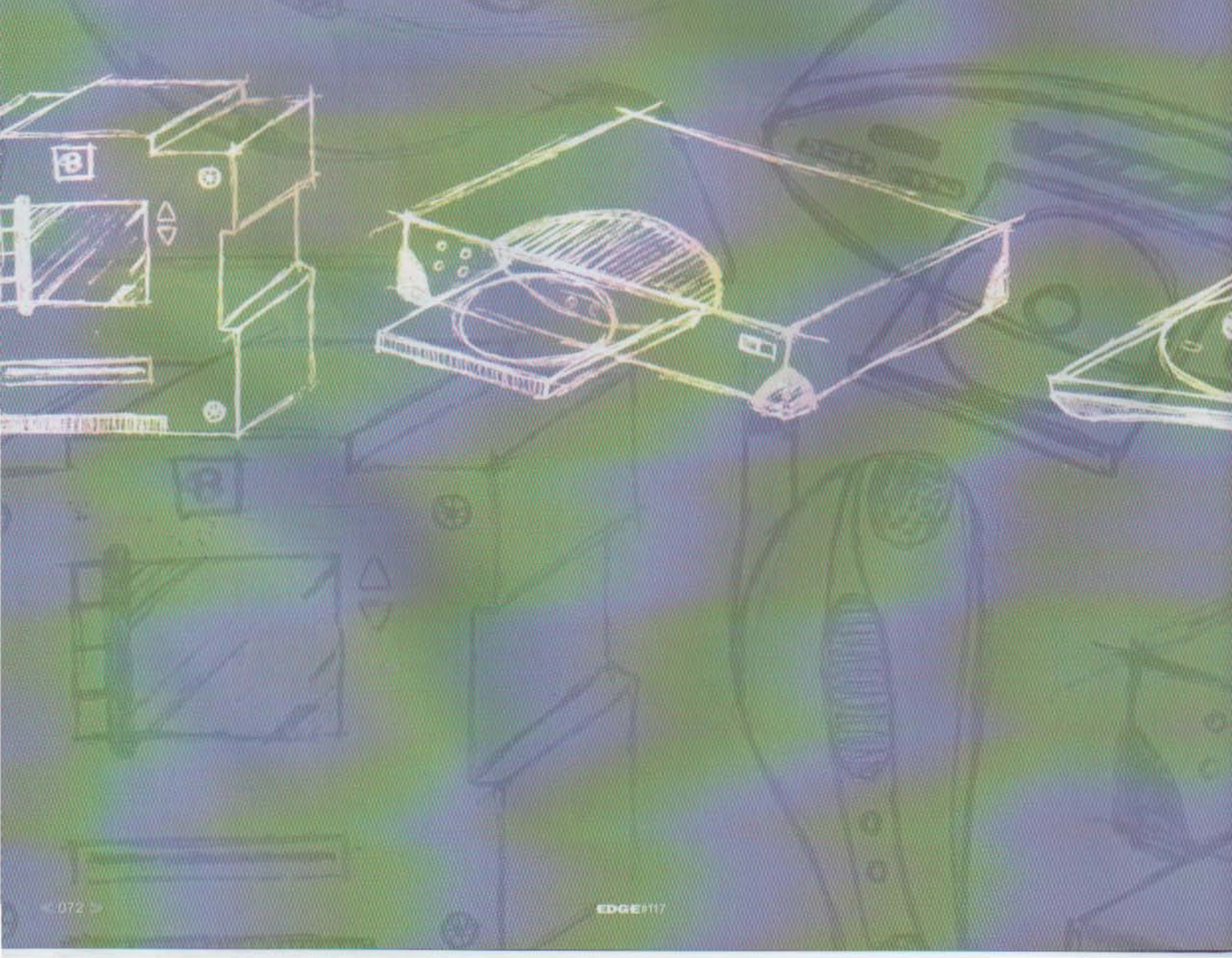
To most sensible videogame players, the following will sound like Hell on Earth: "Adventure racing involves covering very long distance courses in the wilderness using one or more disciplines, including running, trekking, mountain biking, canoeing and whatever else the race organisers throw at you." That's **Aaryn Flynn**, smiling. These usually team-based events can run for over 36 hours (endurance races actually last two weeks), and take place all over the world, from British Columbia to New Zealand and Vietnam. The sport was invented by French journalist Gerard Fusil who oversaw the first adventure race, The Raid Gauloises, in 1989. Since then dozens of similar events have sprung up all over the globe and it's getting big enough to attract major corporate sponsorship (Nike has a hand in Canada's Sea2Summit race). The last event Flynn took part in was the invitingly titled Canadian Death Race, which involved running a 125km course over three mountains in 24 hours. Which is perhaps an even more gruelling task than attempting to satisfy 'Star Wars' nuts with his current work project, *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Order*. But amid all this physical activity, Flynn hasn't abandoned all the usual trappings of the clichéd developer lifestyle, as he explains, "My wife crews for me during the races, bringing me my bike, running shoes and whatever else I may need during the race – even pizza." Yep, you can take the programmer out of the studio, but…

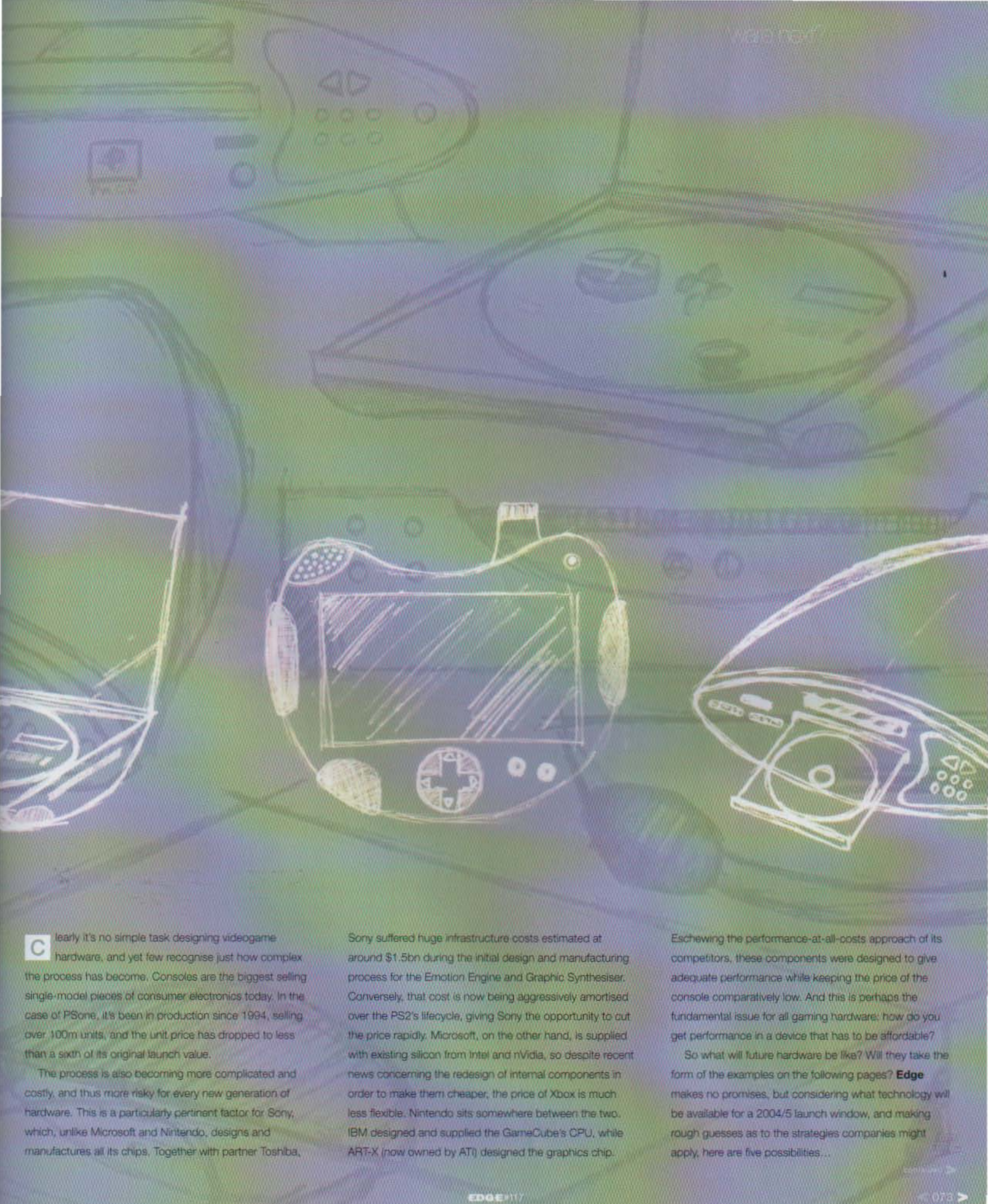
Suggested materials:

Books – Martin Dugard – 'Surviving the Toughest Race on Earth' (Tab Books)
Rob Sleemaker and Ray Browning – 'SERIOUS Training for Endurance Athletes' (Human Kinetics)
DVD – Any of the 'Eco-Challenge' series available from www.discovery.com
Website – www.arextreme.com/

'ware next?

It's been mere months since console manufacturers rolled out their latest wave of hardware. Nevertheless, somewhere in their R&D labs, heads are being scratched because the release of a new console can only mean one thing: it's time to start working on the next one. **Edge** contemplates the next hardware wave...

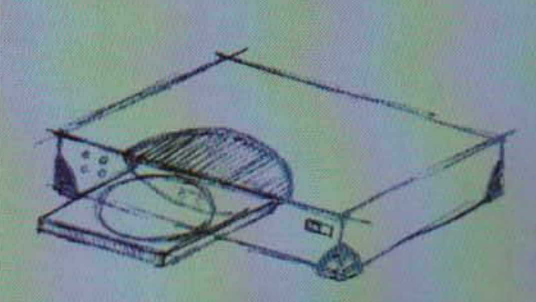


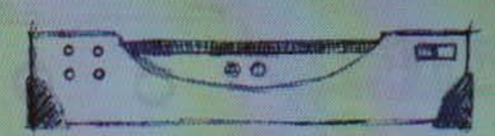


Clearly it's no simple task designing videogame hardware, and yet few recognise just how complex the process has become. Consoles are the biggest selling single-model pieces of consumer electronics today. In the case of PSone, it's been in production since 1994, selling over 100m units, and the unit price has dropped to less than a sixth of its original launch value.

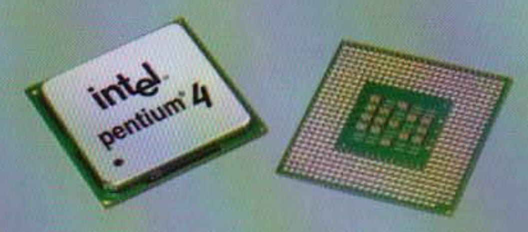
The process is also becoming more complicated and costly, and thus more risky for every new generation of hardware. This is a particularly pertinent factor for Sony, which, unlike Microsoft and Nintendo, designs and manufactures all its chips. Together with partner Toshiba, Sony suffered huge infrastructure costs estimated at around $1.5bn during the initial design and manufacturing process for the Emotion Engine and Graphic Synthesiser. Conversely, that cost is now being aggressively amortised over the PS2's lifecycle, giving Sony the opportunity to cut the price rapidly. Microsoft, on the other hand, is supplied with existing silicon from Intel and nVidia, so despite recent news concerning the redesign of internal components in order to make them cheaper, the price of Xbox is much less flexible. Nintendo sits somewhere between the two. IBM designed and supplied the GameCube's CPU, while ART-X (now owned by ATI) designed the graphics chip. Eschewing the performance-at-all-costs approach of its competitors, these components were designed to give adequate performance while keeping the price of the console comparatively low. And this is perhaps the fundamental issue for all gaming hardware: how do you get performance in a device that has to be affordable?

So what will future hardware be like? Will they take the form of the examples on the following pages? **Edge** makes no promises, but considering what technology will be available for a 2004/5 launch window, and making rough guesses as to the strategies companies might apply, here are five possibilities...





The Baseline-Box features a 60Gb hard drive, four controller ports and plays DVDs out of the box



A 0.13-micron P4 chip could power the Baseline-Box, along with a raft of other off-the-shelf components

Moore's Law 2005 (aka Baseline-Box)

The simplest future game console to investigate is the one that tracks the performance increases on the standard components as predicted by Moore's Law. As a rule of thumb, this states that the number of transistors that will fit on a square of silicon doubles every 18 months. However, graphics chip designers claim that differences between CPUs and graphics processing units (GPUs) mean their technology is actually moving faster than Moore's Law. Chief scientist David Kirk reckons, for example, that at present nVidia is doubling the performance of its products every six months. Combining these two factors over a five-year cycle would potentially see CPU performance increasing by a factor of ten, while GPU performance rises 1,000 times. This is unlikely to be realised, though, as the major limitation of this off-the-shelf approach means it will require components, such as the CPU, which already exist. The faster cycles of the graphics market provides more flexibility to design a custom chip but it will remain a typical PC component rather than something exotic, such as the Sony's Graphics Synthesiser. Combined together in typical PC fashion, it's hard to balance the two, especially with respect to ensuring there's enough bandwidth to supply the graphics chip with enough data for it to work at full potential. The upside to this approach is that it offers very high performance while requiring relatively low startup costs.

Connectivity and storage are broadly the same as the current generation of consoles, although there is a larger hard drive. Most publishers are cautious about moving towards a digital distribution model for games, though, so downloadable content seems likely to be limited to new levels, skins and characters. The game focus of the console also means that there will be no push to download music or movies, but the console plays DVDs out of the box without the need to buy a dedicated DVD peripheral, as is the case with Xbox.

Specifications

CPU: 0.13-micron Pentium 4 or Athlon 2600 chip running at between 2–2.4GHz with 256Mb of unified RAM shared with GPU: 0.09 micron GeForce7 equivalent, running at 500MHz with 64 programmable graphics pipelines operating under DirectX 10.5
Theoretical performance: 400m polygons/sec
Estimated actual performance: 50m polygons/sec
Theoretical bandwidth: 20Gb/s storage: 60Gb hard drive, 24 x 4.7Gb DVD
Networking: 10/100Mbps Ethernet broadband modem
Peripherals: four ports, headset and microphone combo bundled with unit
Initial manufacturing cost: $400
Advantages: relatively cheap to design and manufacture, great performance, easy to develop games for
Disadvantages: low performance-to-cost ratio; an evolutionary rather than revolutionary product; manufacturing cost remains high throughout lifecycle; large physical size
Likelihood: 80 per cent
Killer app: *Halo 4*



In terms of image processing, a variant of nVidia's graphics solutions would be a particularly safe bet

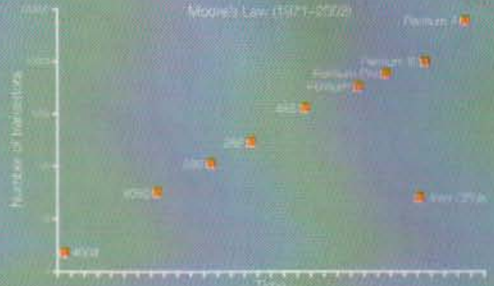
The future of: system architecture

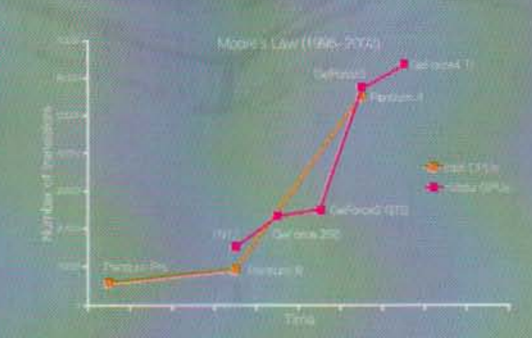
With over ten years of experience delving into consoles' inner workings, Andy Beveridge, director of development tool specialist SN Systems, is well placed to predict their future direction. "The obvious thing is more power and more memory, but more power is getting difficult," he warns. "You can't just make one component faster any more. You have to share the workload out and then everything has to be balanced."

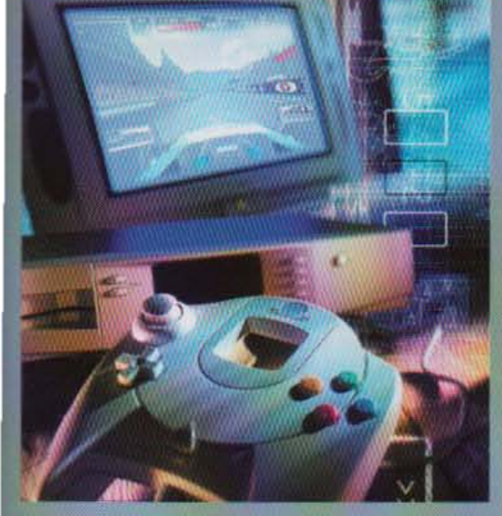


He believes that balancing systems will become critical in future. "There are two approaches," he says. "The first uses a flexible architecture with fairly uncommitted versatile 'nodes' (a node being a computing unit of some sort) which lets the developer decide how to balance the use of those various nodes." The other is an assembly or pipeline approach. "In this case you have a graphics pipeline dedicated to a task and with some degree of programmability, and then replicate that pipeline many times to get high throughput," he says.

These are currently implemented respectively by PlayStation2, Xbox and GameCube. "While these philosophies look like extreme cases now, I expect them to be taken to real extremes in the next generation of hardware," Beveridge predicts.







Pace's groundbreaking set-top box technology made use of Sega's defunct 128bit Dreamcast architecture

Set-top Console (aka SkyStation)

Convergence between set-top boxes and videogame consoles has long been mooted because technically speaking they are broadly similar. The chips that power PlayStation2 can be licensed by set-top box manufacturers, while Microsoft's loss-making WebTV division, now called MSNTV, would love to release a Xbox-based system, which is why there are all those HomeStation rumours. UK manufacturer Pace even proposed a Dreamcast-based system.

The big issue to be overcome is the business model. Because most set-top boxes are given away free with a channel subscription, they need to be as cheap as possible. However, by 2004, the cost of a PS2-based set-top box would be low enough to make it an economically viable model, particularly if the ability to play PSone and PS2 games meant consumers could be charged a nominal $50 for the box. It's hard to see this model working with any game console other than PlayStation2. Even by 2004, GameCube and Xbox won't have either the software library or massmarket recognition of PlayStation.

As well as gaming and interactive TV functions, the Set-top Console is also able to record TV programmes on its hard drive, and download movies and music. In addition, it will be the device on which developers and publisher first experiment with episodic games, although these will be used to support TV brands such as 'Big Brother' and 'EastEnders' rather than being games in their own right. For this reason, it's likely they will be simple Flash and Java games rather than hardcore 3D shooters and the like. Neither will the domestic gateway be able to handle multiplayer online games. Despite the fact that some units will be connected to broadband cable services, the majority of systems will use satellite connections, the only available return path to the content server being an ordinary phone connection.

The most likely scenario for the Set-top Console would see a partnership signed by Sony with BSkyB and other network operators such as US DirecTV, with manufacturers such as Pace and Motorola building the boxes under contract.



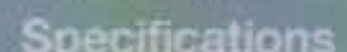
Current-generation set-top boxes vary in feature sets, but SkyStation's hard drive would be a core element

The future of: consoles as set-top boxes

As consumer entertainment segment manager of ARM, the UK chip designer which powers 70 per cent of mobile phones, as a well as PDA, Game Boy Advance and various set-top boxes, **Noel Hurley** is perhaps uniquely placed to comment on convergence of gaming technology into more mainstream consumer electronics.

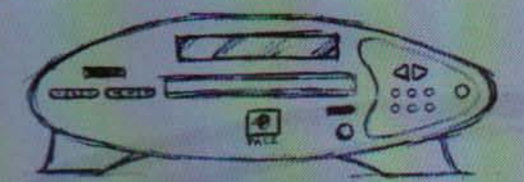
NOEL HURLEY
ARM

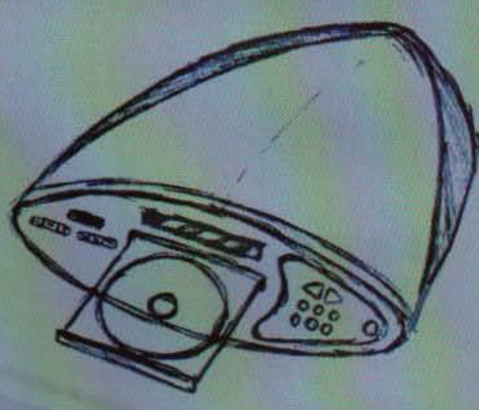
"I think that the concept of a set-top box within a new games console has some merit, especially as a second box in the home," he ponders, although he predicts there are some obstacles to be overcome before it becomes reality. "How do you handle service provider-specific OS and middleware requirements and the different pay-TV security models?" he queries. "These, coupled with political will, means that we are probably a little way off seeing this kind of device manufactured in any volume. But what we may see is digital set-top boxes that are capable of running content from older generation games consoles."



Specifications

CPU/GPU: 0.18-micron, integrated Emotion Engine and Graphic Synthesiser system-on-chip (SoC) with 32Mb of RAM
Theoretical performance: 30m polygons/sec
Estimated actual performance: 10m polygons/sec
Theoretical bandwidth: 2Gb/s
Storage: 4 x 4.7Gb DVD, 40Gb hard drive,
Networking: local connection via cable or satellite to local service provider
Peripherals: infrared TV controller, two DualShock controller ports
Initial manufacturing cost: $100
Advantages: brings new functionality to set-top box market; expands game market; allows new episodic business models to be attempted
Disadvantages: no multiplayer; blurs the distinction between games and interactive TV; uses obsolete technology
Likelihood: 75 per cent
Killer app: *Big Sims Brother*





In addition to two DualShock controller ports and a DVD drive, the SkyStation has a 40Gb hard drive on which users can record their favourite television programmes. In addition, it can also connect to broadband, cable or satellite

Ken Kutaragi's wild dream (aka Parallel'o'PlayStation)

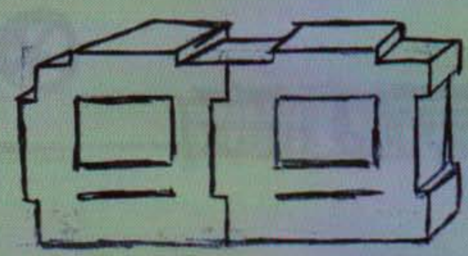
The ambition of **Ken Kutaragi**, the driving force behind PlayStation, has never been in question. "The computer embodies the most advanced technology developed by the human race. It is on the same level as the steam engine or the printing press. Future developments will far outstrip anything we can predict," he said back in 1999. And while PlayStation2 was a shock to the industry, Sony's next console promises to be nothing short of revolutionary.

Much has been made of the partnership signed by Sony, IBM and Toshiba – first called The Cell, now known as The Grid. This technology-sharing agreement will allow Sony and Toshiba to use IBM's advanced silicon-manufacturing processes to create feature-rich but low-powered system-on-chips (SoCs). IBM has said it expects the architecture to allow each SoC to feature between four and 12 processor cores per chip, depending on application.

But the key driver for this new approach is connectivity. While the Parallel'o'PlayStation will function as a standalone unit, it will come into its own when it's connected to the PlayStation Network. Designed to be distributive processors, the Grid SoCs will use the network they are attached to increase their overall processing power. Sony's overall goal is that such SoCs will eventually be cheap enough to be included in many pieces of consumer electronics, thus providing the potential to increase the power Parallel'o'PlayStation by connecting it to, say, a Wega TV or Sony DVD player.

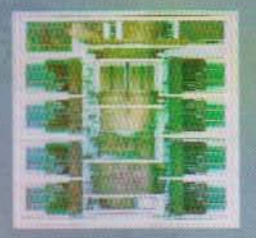
To complete the hardware, Sony has already redesigned its PS2 hardware, combining the Emotion Engine and Graphics Synthesiser into one chip, in conjunction with silicon engineer Simplex. The new (R)I-32 chip has eight times as much memory as its PS2 predecessor and can display scenes at a resolution of 1,920 x 1,080 pixels, in a frame, in progressive mode, which is higher than the output capability of current-generation, high-definition TVs.

Elsewhere, the Parallel'o'PlayStation features the usual broadband and hard drive features, which Sony will use to become the first digital entertainment company, leveraging music, games and movies via its encrypted, copyright-secure network. Other functionality includes support for Sony's new Blu-ray DVD standard and the use of Memory Sticks in place of memory cards. It will also see Sony finally embrace four controller ports as standard. The range of peripherals will be expanded with Webcam and communication units bundled with the console, in order to enhance online applications.

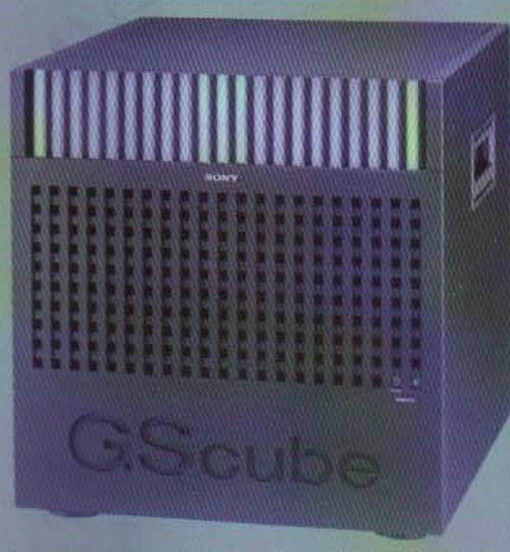


Additional modules could be connected to the Parallel'o'PlayStation for upgrades. The unit could download films and games, and will feature four DualShock3 ports and a DVD/Blu-ray disk drive









Sony's GScube: parallel processing combining 16 Graphics Synthesiser (top left) and Emotion Engine (top right) sets

Specifications

CPU: 0.09-micron Grid-based CPU running at 1.5GHz with 256Mb of RAM and capable of performing over one trillion calculations/sec
GPU: 0.18-micron (R)I-32 Graphics Synthesiser running at 150MHz with 256Mb of RAM
Theoretical performance: 150m polygons/sec (single unit)
Estimated actual performance: 75m polygons/sec (single unit)
Theoretical bandwidth: 48Gb/sec
Storage: 100Gb hard drive, 24 x 4.7Gb DVD, 8 x 27Gb Blu-ray Disc, 128Mb Memory Stick
Networking: 10/100 Ethernet connection
Peripherals: four DualShock3 ports; headset and microphone combo and EyeToy2 Webcam are bundled
Initial manufacturing cost: $600
Advantages: revolutionary design; easily upgradeable; high performance; unlocks new business model for developers and publishers; successfully combines role of console with domestic gateway
Disadvantages: high initial investment required; difficult for developers to unlock its full potential; relies on quality of network; potentially confusing for consumers
Likelihood: 90 per cent
Killer app: *The Getaway* online

Nokia's gamble (aka PlayPhone)

Convergence between smartphones and PDA is driven by the PlayPhone, a concept introduced by Nokia but quickly adopted by other manufacturers such as Samsung, Motorola and Sony Ericsson. Three-dimensional graphics functionality is provided by a system-on-chip ARM core and integrated graphics chip, which provides better-than-PlayStation-quality graphics. The device itself consists of a 480 x 360 resolution colour screen which also acts a software keyboard and number pad for phone and limited PDA functionality. A handsfree Bluetooth-enabled headset is also provided.

The most important aspect of the PlayPhone, however, is its connectivity, which consists of an always-on 3G connection as well as its Bluetooth capability. Due to its limited memory, games are downloaded in an episodic manner, a couple of levels at a time. They can be flashed to memory using Bluetooth at shops, too. These standalone games themselves are similar to those available for the current generation of PDAs. A big advantage of this kind of device is that they allow gamers to access persistent massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs) so they can keep in touch with events as they unfold without having access to a desktop or living room console. In addition, they can take part of the game with them: training a creature in *Black & White*, for example. Indeed, much of the cost of mobile phones today is subsidised today by network subscription, so network providers such as Orange and T-Mobile cut deals with MMOG publishers such as Sony Online, which gives away these phones with two-year subscriptions to its games.



Nokia already produces mobile handsets with specific extra functionality, such as MP3 playback on its 5510



A Bluetooth-enabled headset (such as Nokia's, above) would be a welcome standard for technology such as the PlayPhone

Specifications

CPU/GPU: 0.13-micron ARM 11 core with integrated Imagination Technologies PowerVR MBX running at 150MHz
Theoretical performance: 2m polygons/sec
Estimated actual performance: 1m polygons/sec
Theoretical bandwidth: 512Mb/sec
Storage: 64Mb of flash memory and 64Mb of RAM
Networking: 3G mobile connection, Bluetooth, infrared IrDA link
Peripherals: handsfree Bluetooth-enabled headset
Initial manufacturing cost: $300
Advantages: enables new revenue streams for publishers; network operators and hardware manufacturers; relatively powerful; cheap for consumer, great connectivity
Disadvantages: high manufacturing costs; not a focused device; too big to fit in pocket; require complex business deal
Likelihood: 60 per cent
Killer app: *Black & White Universe*

The future of: bandwidth

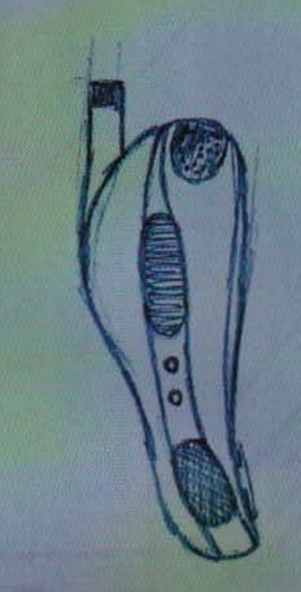
Superfast silicon is all well and good but if developers can't get the huge amount of data this implies moving quickly between processors, the power will be wasted. **Adam Billyard**, CTO of middleware provider Criterion Software, thinks changing the way developers deal with the bandwidth bottleneck will have a crucial effect on the games of tomorrow.

"One approach will be to move away from the coarse grain 'load a level, play it, load a new level' model to something much more fine grain involving source-agnostic streaming," he predicts, adding, "As a gamer I don't really care where the data comes from." This will particularly be the case when always-on broadband becomes a standard technology as this means game data can be streamed as required from a central server instead of, or as well as being calculated in-situ on the game console itself.



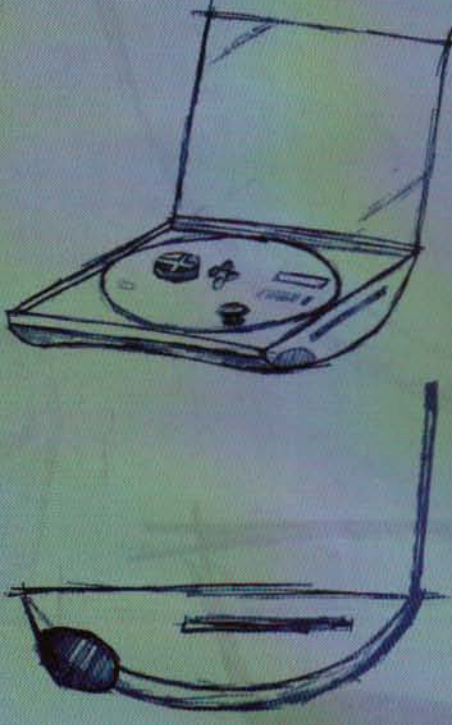
ADAM BILLYARD
CRITERION

"The other approach is to use more procedurally generated assets that have a tiny footprint but can generate vast amounts of varied data," Billyard points out. This is already being implemented to a certain extent on PlayStation2, but he expects its use to become far more widespread.





The PlayPhone, designed to be held comfortably in two hands, also comes with a Bluetooth connected headphone/microphone and a 3G aerial



The GameTeenager features an ultra-thin backlit screen and Bluetooth connectivity for gaming on the move. Back in the living room, however, the GameTeenager slots neatly into the basestation

Nintendo's niche (aka GameTeenager)

Pressure from mobile phones and PDAs in one direction and a brutal price war between Microsoft and Sony pushes Nintendo to converge Game Boy Advance and GameCube to create a portable concept in the vein of Sony's PSone plus dedicated screen.

Nicknamed GameTeenager, the device is roughly A5-sized and uses a clam-shell design. Opening it reveals an ultra-thin back-lit colour screen of resolution 640 x 480. Backwards-compatible with GameCube, it uses the same proprietary 1.5Gb DVDs. Processing power is provided by a modified version of the GameCube's Gekko CPU enhanced with additional RAM and integrated with a custom graphics chip to create a neat system-on-chip. Battery life, as ever with Nintendo, is a concern, but eight hours from a fully charged battery is considered adequate. Interestingly, as a standalone system GameTeenager doesn't feature connectivity apart from a Bluetooth link. This allows ad hoc gaming networks and communities to grow. But its use as a mobile console is only half of the story. Also available as part of the technology is a home basestation, into which the unit plugs. This provides power, enables connection to a monitor or TV screen, and provides broadband connectivity. It also houses four wireless controller ports for a more traditional living room gaming experience.

The future of: the three-horse race

Co-creator of *Elite* and MD of Frontier Developments, **David Braben** has been in the development business longer than most. He's not convinced that all the current console manufacturers will make it though to the next round.

DAVID BRABEN
FRONTIER

"I think we will see Microsoft invest a great deal of money to compete with Sony over the next few years. The real question is whether Nintendo will match the other two, or whether it will become a games house as Sega before it, when it comes to the next generation of machines," he suggests. "I'd imagine the next year or so is critical for this – if the GameCube games coming out soon don't deliver their promised quality, this will put a follow-on machine into question."

Specifications

CPU/GPU: 0.13-micron enhanced Gekko CPU and a custom graphics chip with 64Mb of RAM
Theoretical performance: 40m polygons/sec
Estimated actual performance: 15m polygons/sec
Theoretical bandwidth: 5Gb/s
Storage: 64Mb of flash memory and 128Mb of memory, 20Gb hard drive in basestation
Networking: Bluetooth connection, 10/100 Ethernet connection via basestation
Peripherals: four ports for wireless controllers via basestation
Initial manufacturing cost: GameTeenager $150, basestation $100
Advantages: unique device; true gaming on the go; Bluetooth connection is great for playgrounds; established technology
Disadvantages: high-risk strategy; complex integration process; extra cost of building in mechanical robustness; basestation risks confusing consumers
Likelihood: 25 per cent
Killer app: *Mario* on the move





Sony's handheld devices feature clear screen tech; GameTeenager, too, would feature an ultra-thin display

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to the following sentiments: zero: nothing, one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Edge's most played

Super Mario Sunshine

It may not be as gentle or as revolutionary as *Super Mario 64*, but the plumber's latest outing still contains a level of imagination that is simply breathtaking.



(GameCube) Nintendo

Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis

No other game recreates the nature of warfare better: helicopter combat, tank patrols, field medics and, of course, hiding in bushes until the worst of it is over.



(PC) Codemasters

Ikaruga

Fiendishly difficult but never infuriating. The unusual complexity of the gameplay and the sumptuous balancing act Treasure achieves is quite remarkable.



(DC, GC) ESP

Rocky

Few games generate such fervour, few games blister the thumbs so much, few games trigger the instinct to jump around the room yelling, "You ain't so bad!"



(Xbox, PS2, GC) Rage

Stop the clock

It's time for a change

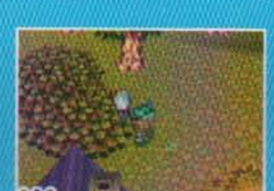
Imagine this. You are playing a level in *Blinx*. You have collected the right time crystals, solved a few rudimentary puzzles, done some classic platforming, and eliminated the last of the level's enemies. But, just before you reach the goal, the in-game clock counts up the last few seconds to ten minutes, and it's Game Over. Frustration ensues; you have to do everything you've just done, all over again, exactly the same, except for fractionally quicker. No fun.

But *Blinx* also gives a glimpse of how it could use time in the correct way; it awards grades depending on the speed with which you complete the level. It's only implemented superficially – from D+ to S+, there's no real reward, just a measure of your success that you can brag about with some (small) pride – but it's there. Mostly, though, you'll just be relieved you've got there without the time running out. That's the thing: racing against the clock instils needless panic. You can't take a moment to take in the environments, plan attack, because every second you waste is a second that you might need at the end of the level – you might not, of course, but there's no way of knowing that when you're halfway through. Why is the limit there at all?

Perhaps as a thematic 'Time Sweeper' thing, or maybe cross-pollination from another genre. Time does play a crucial part in racing games, particularly in rallying, for example *Rally Fusion* and *Colin McRae Rally 3*. In fact, there it's the whole point – the player has to get from A to B as quickly as possible, and then go back and do it quicker still, and so on. It is you against the clock, but here the experience is pure. It is the same the second time through, and the third, and it is the only thing you have to worry about. In *Blinx*, it is one of a dozen concerns.

Enemies and platforms can be defeated. Time, however much Blinx pretends to have power over it, cannot. The progression is inexorable, and that inevitability is depressing. In the 8bit era, games set time limits because the technology didn't facilitate too many different ways of challenging the player. Now we've moved on, and while bonuses for fast times are welcome, **Edge** believes it's time to quit arbitrary time limits that push you, rush you, then kill you because you're not quick enough at second guessing the level design.





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Animal Crossing

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan, US), TBC (UK)**





Tom Nook's shop allows players to buy that must-have outfit or piece of furniture. He restocks every day

Animal Crossing, Nintendo's much anticipated 'communication game', has no real objective save living an idyllic life, and your first week teaches you to live. You learn to fish (equip rod, press A by river, wait for a bite, press A again). You learn to catch bugs (equip net, sneak up on bug, press A). You learn to comb the village for objects of value (shells on the shore, fossils in the ground, salvageable miscellany in the town dump and at the lost property office). And you learn the rudimentary communication aspects too, which take the shape of scripted yes/no conversations with the random characters that move in and out of your unique town.

And that's the problem with this review, because when you take any single element of *Animal Crossing* on its own, break it down and write it down, then it appears mundane. In essence, the whole game is cutesy sleight-of-hand for adults who want to be fooled, but God, when you believe, it is hypnotic, addictive. The town in which you live is created at random, unique, and once you have spent an hour wandering around *your* town it is almost impossible to view it with cynicism, or even consider it as code. It is magical, and entirely yours.

"In essence, the whole game is cutesy sleight-of-hand for adults who want to be fooled, but God, when you believe, it is hypnotic"

Your house, which you upgrade and upsize by paying off your mortgage at the local post office. Your neighbours, humanised animals selected at random from Nintendo's large bank of loving, timid, cantankerous characters. Your furniture, available both in collectible thematic sets (modern, kiddie, space-age and so on) or talking point centrepieces (Link's Master Sword, for example). Your clothing, designed on a pixel grid at the town tailors. Your museum exhibits, your fruit trees, your collection of NES games. It is all yours, and the pride is what keeps you coming back.



Skeletons are found in sections. Manage to complete a full dinosaur (like the triceratops above) and the museum curator will give you a brief lecture on the significance of your find. Now that's edutainmer





Catching a rare fish provides the player with a dilemma; should they donate it to the museum, where they can view it in the aquarium, or exchange it at Tom Nook's shop for lots of money?

Finding the right stuff is the hook. Items can be bought in the town shop, but that holds limited stock, so the real key to forming that perfect collection comes with code trading. Provide the shopkeeper with the name of a friend and their town along with the item you want to send, and he'll give you a 24-digit alphanumeric code. They go to their shop, type it in and receive the item you just sent. It's an exceptionally well-executed idea, and one that has proved the bedding ground for a thriving Internet community.

And, by going to the station and trading memory cards with a friend, your character can visit someone else's town, admire their surroundings, use their shop, meet their villagers, and maybe have one of them follow you home. Bits of the *Animal Crossing* world leak from village to village like the sweetest virus, and sometimes you'll lust for the global cross-pollination that could happen in an online world. The lack of that is a shame, as is the omission of any simultaneous multiplayer exploration, because while *Animal Crossing* is a game built on the premise of showing off, perversely it is one that you can only ever play alone.

That's exacerbated by the fact that the gameworld is locked to the system clock. As well as affecting things on an hourly scale – daylight comes and goes, different bugs appear at night, shops shut and NPCs head to bed – the game's calendar provides













Villagers bitch, celebrate, complain, sing, sulk and more. Here, local blue cow suggests to Edge's character how he'd improve the village if he could. Edge really wishes it had a heated pool, too



Spotting items in other people's houses only alerts you to the fact they exist; you can't go to the shop and order them. But it's likely that someone on a message board will have one for trade

yearly events. So in winter the snow covers the ground, and in spring the blossom twists through the air, a fishing tournament runs every Sunday through November, and so on. These are things that every village throughout the world shares, things that give life to the game when the passion for bug-hunting and home improvement is starting to wane. You load up the game just to see what's going on. But maybe there's nothing going on today, which is kind of the problem.

The difficulty that some gamers will have lies in *Animal Crossing*'s lack of intensity. The first 15 minutes you spend in your village every day are gloriously exciting, but soon there is nothing to do, and you're forced to switch off, wait for tomorrow. Try to rush through the game, and it becomes frustrating, because you want to keep going, but the more you push at the boundaries, the more the game's limitations become obvious – tasks repeat, events reoccur, working becomes a chore rather than a joy – and you're forced to concede that this is not a game for a one-night stand. It has limitations, sure, but love is long-term, and providing you recognise that from the start, you will fall for this, deeply and truly.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Name that tune



Each town has its own signature tune which rings out on the hour every hour and is (somewhat erratically) interpreted by each character as their greeting. It's possible to compose your own music by altering the score posted on the message board by the post office. The brightly-coloured frog symbols may be something of a departure from traditional sonic notation, but the system is quickly learned and easily manipulated.

Blinx: The Time Sweeper

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studios** Developer: **Artoon** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now**



Thanks to 'temporal distortion', the sky in *Blinx*'s universe slips slickly from night to day. Shadowing is poor, though

"Actually control the flow of time," says Microsoft's *Blinx* promo material, "a feature only possible on Xbox". A statement so bold, incredible, enticing it deserves italics – *actually control the flow of time* – it's no wonder Microsoft's upper echelons regard this as one of the games that will sell the Xbox. Perhaps it will, on that piece of hyperbole alone, but it is better described thus, "A platform game with clever power-ups." It is often competent, for sure, but to see it as a saviour, or a revolution? Call in 20 years of jumping déjà vu; kill all the monsters and get to the goal.

Like all good assassinations, begin with the killing. The clunky combat is the first thing that will frustrate those expecting fast-paced thrills from Sonic Team's Best Pals™, Artoon. Blinx sucks up junk with his hoover, and spits it out as ammunition. The smallest pieces each take two or three seconds to collect. Five shots of the erratic firing system later – which, without a reticle, slips irritatingly between automatic aim and manual – and you're sucking again. It is hard work being a time sweeper. There is much sweeping, little time.

"Blinx is better described thus, 'A platform game with clever power-ups.' It is often competent, for sure, but to see it as a saviour, or a revolution?"





Each of the five time controls has an appropriate signature filter. While you record yourself, the screen goes green

Time crystals come in five colours. Collect three of the same colour in a group of four, and Blinx receives a power-up that, theoretically at least, allows him to bend time to your will. Yellow is slow, blue is pause, green is record, orange is fast-forward, and purple is rewind. Fast-forward, pause and slow act on time and the local environment as you'd imagine, allowing Blinx to defeat faster enemies or negotiate moving platform sections. Record tapes ten seconds of movement, then rewinds and plays it back immediately, required to solve puzzles that would ordinarily need two people. Rewind acts on the gameworld in pre-ordained ways; if a statue has collapsed, then using rewind will reform it, however long ago the destruction happened.

That last example, the structured rewind, demonstrates just how restricted the temporal manipulation really is. The time tools aren't brushes with which the player can paint their own level solution; they're keys to unlock specific doors, and you don't *actually control the flow of time* any more than *Super Mario Sunshine* allows you to *actually live the life of a plumber*. A rewind is essential to get past a collapsed bridge, as a record is to do some two-way seesaw jumping. If Blinx does not have the right time power-ups (and there is a good chance he won't, since, initially, he can only hold three at once), he cannot get through that section. All that he can do is retrace his steps and seek the appropriate crystals, but there is a good chance they will be inaccessible, or already used. They do not respawn; if they are gone, the only thing to do is quit out and restart. Completing a level without precognition involves either learning what lies ahead or sheer luck.



The junk that Blinx uses as ammunition comes in small, medium and large sizes, but initially the feline can only suck up the smallest pieces. Better vacuum cleaners can be bought at the shop

That's the thing: for a game that, if you buy into the hype, is all about adding another dimension, *Blinx* is curiously restrictive. The limited number of time controls forbid experiments and each level has a ten-minute time limit, which affords little opportunity to explore, and will discourage players from seeking out the hidden cat medals. Those are meant to provide an incentive for replay, but even when you've gone back to a level and found one, you still have to kill all the enemies and get to the exit for it to register. Chances are you'll run out of time; it's so much effort, so little joy, so little reward. The levels themselves are mostly cleverly wound corridors, too, albeit increasingly well disguised as the game progresses.

There are plenty of other elementary errors. Highlights include a camera that arbitrarily shifts 90 degrees to the direction you're heading in, elements of the game you can only discover by dying, and the environmental design, which starts well

Previously in E112















Using fast-forward speeds everything up, and protects Blinx with a impenetrable sphere. It's probably the least useful of the controls



enough with dark angular cartoon towns and lush, bright canals, but soon descends into platform cliché. Crumbling platforms, pendulum scythes, a slippy-slidey ice-world. A mine cart level. A mine cart level! This was meant to be the next step in platforming – *actually control the flow of time*. It was meant to be a new dimension. Instead, all we've got is *Crash Bandicoot* with a broken wristwatch.

Edge rating: Five out of ten



If Blinx should run through water while time is paused, he leaves a static wake behind him. When the pause time (shown by the orange bar at the foot of the screen) runs out, the water walls collapse beautifully

Abort, retry, fail

Whenever an accident befalls Blinx – camera twisting 90 degrees above a spike pit, an unseen enemy hitting you with a bench from behind, you know the sort of thing – time rewinds a few moments to a point when, in theory, death is avoidable. It's a great idea which appears to work beautifully right up until the retry positions you midway through a double jump, and death/frustration/restart is inevitable.

SOCOM: US Navy SEALs

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEA** Developer: **Zipper Interactive** Price: **$50 (£32)** Release: **Out now (US), March (UK)**





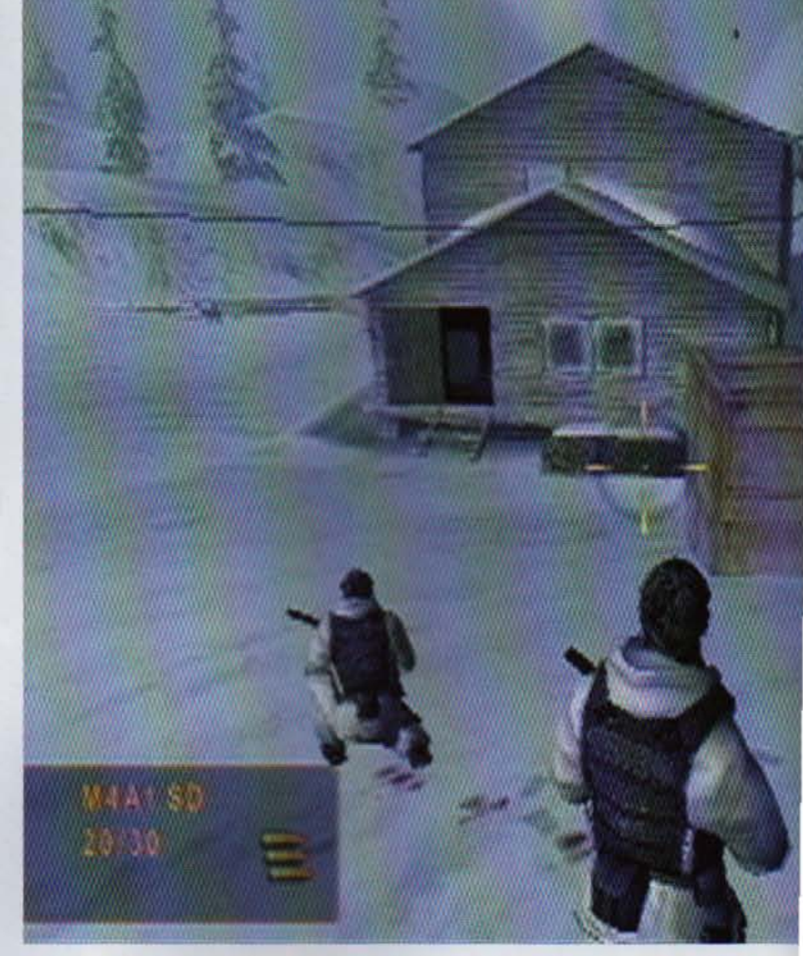
Use of sniper rifles is made harder than it should due to imprecise controls. Calibration helps, but it's still far from being the smoothest operation around

Edge will admit to having experienced problems trying to play *SOCOM* online, in that on most attempts nothing happened and when they did the game's voice communicator device didn't feel like playing (see Band down! Band down!). This, given that the game is a US import, didn't come as a total surprise but is nevertheless required to ensure readers are aware that this is primarily an appraisal of the singleplayer game.

No, it's not unfair. Aware of the potential merit of the offline experience, and the swift realisation that expecting import gamers not to act on their curiosity about this title until the March PAL release is unrealistic, we thought it appropriate to place a call to our favourite importer.

Once out of the envelope, the likelihood that you'll have the headset mic/earphone snugly in place before the disk tray receives the new recruit is high. It looks and feels like a gimmick, but then the game begins and your three team members are talking to you not through the TV speakers but directly into your ear and everything in the gameworld sneaks up a degree in the importance scale.

As the leader of the SEAL unit currently in one of the game's 12 missions you get to talk back – or specifically, you get to instruct. The terminology is simple (eg Bravo – stealth to – Delta) and the list concise enough to learn in a few minutes (alternatively you can navigate the straightforward menu with the X button).



Here, you must restrain and escort an informant back to the extraction zone (once the compound is cleared) but it's also possible to restrain soldiers who surrender when you point a gun at their face

"Don't let the angular, simplistic nature of the visuals fool you – some serious effort and attention to detail has gone into this"



Your interaction within the game is done via an action button, the function of which changes depending on situations

'Concise' doesn't mean 'limited', however. In addition to the obvious "hold position", "regroup", "fire at will" type commands, your CPU SEALs can be asked to infiltrate and clear buildings, to set or disable explosives, to provide cover and generally deal with all of the varied aspects missions throw your way.

At times they are very convincing, their movement impressively captured, remarkably Hollywood-like and able to negotiate their environment with almost tangible intelligence. Yet occasionally they forget their training and behave like bad actors, breaking cover needlessly or seemingly hesitating to gun down a hostile threat barely more than four AK-47s' length away. It's enough of a regular occurrence to frustrate, particularly as this is the kind of game that rewards a careful and considerate approach. Spending 20 minutes choreographing your advance on a group of Thai islets only for one of your crew's keen trigger finger to give away your position seems unfair. The only consolation, if you can call it that, is that the enemy regularly displays more moronic behaviour, giving you time to get a shot in (though given the slightly clumsy control system, despite the calibration options, you'd be better off firing a few rounds just to make sure you hit your target).

Other than the above disappointment it would be easy to attack the game's most vulnerable facet but don't let the angular, simplistic nature of the visuals fool you – some serious effort and attention to detail has gone into this. The breath of your team-mates in Alaska, the footprints in the snow, blood stains from the wounded, the convincing nature of explosions (and the momentary deafness experienced if stood too close – not an original touch but welcome nonetheless), the excellent sonic recreation of weapons and the realistic behaviour of their projectiles. All of these combine to create an involving environment.

Ultimately, it's this sense of involvement that ensures you put up with the shortcomings. The draw of seeing where your next mission may take you, discovering yet another great touch in the game design, certainly proves compulsive. As does the continuing hunt for that elusive perfectly executed sortie, of course.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Previously in E112



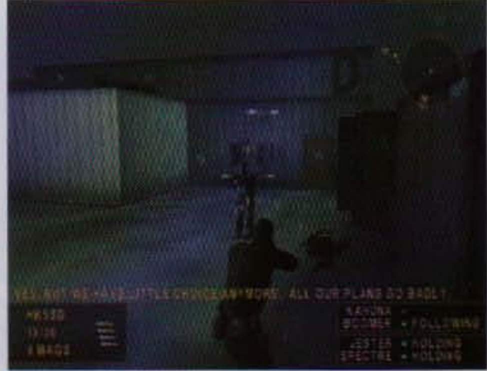






You can play the game in third or firstperson mode. Control, as with most of these games, is a little clumsy but nothing to worry about











While the dynamic soundtrack is a little abrupt, the sound effects are excellent – wait until you hear an AK-47 or M60 being fired. Just one of the areas that *SOCOM* gets very right

Band down! Band down!

Edge's glitchy experience of the online game doesn't appear symptomatic of all *SOCOM* players trying the US import in the UK. Several of the magazine's sources have played the game without trouble (other than the odd circumstance of lack of online etiquette). The broadband-only affair offers a rather limited (by PC standards at least) choice of game options with just three main game modes – Hostage Rescue, Two Team Deathmatch and Demolition, a variant on capture the flag using a centrally located bomb to destroy opponent's base. Expect a full review of this aspect once PAL code is finalised.

Ratchet & Clank

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **Insomniac Games** Price: **£40** Release: **November 8**



There's almost a surfeit of character in *Ratchet & Clank*, from the buddy movie protagonists, to the game's various nefarious nemeses, and indeed the levels themselves, which are intricately detailed



Throughout the game there are an increasingly imaginative range of tools with which to dispatch your opponents

Thanks in part to the unremitting advance of PlayStation2, *Ratchet & Clank* will no doubt shift a considerable number of units at retail. But any commercial success will also be thanks to a combination of bright ideas, high production values and the same commitment to eliminating any unnecessary frustrations that characterised Naughty Dog's *Jak and Daxter*, with which *Ratchet & Clank* shares an engine.

However, now that the recent appearance of a certain moustachioed plumber on GameCube has set new standards for the platform genre, it's impossible not to be disappointed by *Ratchet*



"Now that a certain moustachioed plumber has set new standards for the genre, it's impossible not to be disappointed by Ratchet & Clank"

& Clank's failure to truly engage. While *Super Mario Sunshine* has the capacity to elevate and inspire, *Ratchet & Clank* feels somehow lifeless by comparison.

There's no doubting the overall technical adequacy of the title. Production values and signs of the lavish care with which it's clearly been developed are evident throughout, from the deviously humorous plot to the well worked buddy movie dynamic between the two leads; Ratchet, a surf dude bipedal feline, and Crank, his staid robot companion. Cut-scenes boast a professional polish and the overall visual aesthetic is scintillatingly varied as our eponymous heroes traverse the galaxy, alighting on vastly different planets as they go – all depicted with an almost unprecedented level of visual detail.

And there's no doubting the quality of the imagination that has gone into the design of the game. Ostensibly a pitfall platformer in the mode of *Crash Bandicoot* or *Jak and Daxter*, players are actually treated to a variety of playing styles. There's a whole hoverboard subgame, for example, and extended aerial or turret-based shoot 'em up sections punctuate the action. But the real selling point is the range of gadgets and tools that are accessible throughout the game, either as a reward for completing certain tasks, or for purchase using bolts, the in-game currency.

Acquiring different footwear, for example, allows access to rail-grinding sections. Or magnetic strips that wind deviously through certain levels with scant regard for conventional notions of up or down (and allowing the beautifully detailed cityscapes to be viewed from another perspective). While lockpicks engender mini-puzzles and special headgear allows access to previously inaccessible areas.

But the mainstay of the game is the acquisition of new weapons. And here's the rub. Quite apart from relatively minor niggles, such as an unwieldy camera, or cumbersome controls during shoot 'em up sequences, there is a failing at the heart of the game. Although the various weapons are devilishly inventive, ranging from the basic bomb glove and blaster to decoys and kamikaze robot bombers, they are all essentially guns. There's no sense that you're being given an emergent toolset with which to interact with the gameworld, as in, say, *Ape Escape*. You're just being given different ways to dispatch opponents. Indeed any non-weapon power-ups are used in an



There's also something fundamentally unengaging about the game, owing to level design that's occasionally petulant and always short of the rarefied heights achieved in *Super Mario Sunshine*

Star Fox Adventures

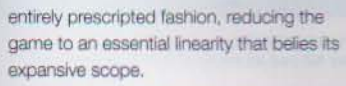
Previously in E112









entirely prescripted fashion, reducing the game to an essential linearity that belies its expansive scope.

Furthermore, this combination of combat sits uneasily with the core platforming dynamic. Together with petulantly positioned save checkpoints, it simply isn't edifying to battle your way through successive combat encounters only to plummet to your doom from a ledge that was obscured by the scenery or was out of view of the wayward camera. It's this discrepancy that highlights another of the game's core failings, which is a rather lacklustre and twitchy set of basic controls – especially when compared to the likes of *Jak and Daxter* or *Super Mario Sunshine*.

Still, if this sounds negative, it's not. It's merely a reflection of how expectations have been raised by these latter two titles. *Ratchet & Clank* is a solidly entertaining game, just not entirely enlivening.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten



For most of the game, Clank serves simply as an upgradeable backpack, but one or two missions allow you direct control, including some that see him transformed into a formidable behemoth



Hidden weapons

As with any platform game worth its salt, *Ratchet & Clank* boasts a hatful of hidden secrets and a diverse range of difficult-to-access nooks and crannies. Determined exploration is rewarded with skill points and gold bolts, which can be used to purchase even more powerful gadgets, while completing the game unlocks a host of supplementary material that brings the game universe to life, ranging from adverts starring the superheroic Quark (who features throughout the game) to mocked up 'Time' magazine covers.

Star Fox Adventures

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **Rare** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now (US), November 22 (UK)**

It's the stuff of 'Heat' magazine. Week by week, the rumours gained momentum until it's what everyone was talking about. One of the cornerstone relationships of the industry, and one everyone assumed would firmly see in its ruby anniversary, crumbled as Twycross outfit Rare was wooed away from its Nintendo homestead by flashy toyboy Microsoft. Regardless of your romantic convictions on the subject, it means that *Star Fox Adventures*, né *Dinosaur Planet*, has now seen its parents split up, and gone from N64 swansong to GameCube parting shot.

Confused offspring it is, too. There's no doubt that *Star Fox Adventures* is one of the most beautiful worlds yet realised on GameCube, and the visual splendour is immense. Later sights prove just as glamorous as the opening stages; Ocean

"SFA houses logic that should be as extinct as the creatures that roam its surface. Little is proffered in terms of exploration, or challenge"





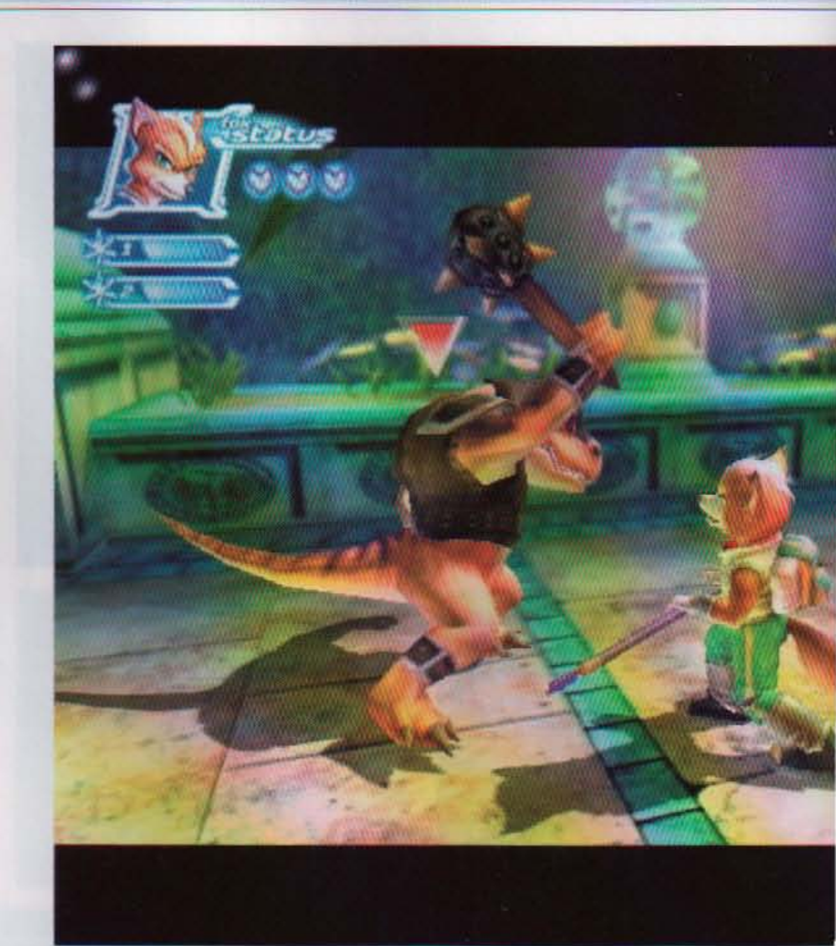


Often your role seems to be little other than a glorified PA to NPCs. Feed me this, fetch me those. No imagination required

Force Point temple, for example, with its rippling columns of suspended water and cylindrical tunnels embroidered with a tapestry of pretty detail, is truly captivating. And the fur effects sported by Fox McCloud, and certain patches of the scenery, add a plush, luxurious solidity to the game. Outside of an occasionally truant framerate, there's little to criticise here as Rare's baroque touch works incredibly well with no hint of clutter.

However, before the narrative can even begin to unfold, a vast shopping list of collectibles soon racks up at the bottom right of the screen, fuelling worries that it might turn into yet another bout of platforming accountancy. It's okay, though, because your progress relies more on completing lock 'n' key puzzles than gathering preset numbers of pick-ups. Sadly, the puzzles presented to the player are wholly asinine.

And this is its biggest failing. *Star Fox Adventures*, it would seem, houses logic that should be as extinct as the creatures that roam its surface. Little is proffered in terms of exploration, or challenge. Everything is prompted, whether with button presses, instructions from team-mates or context-sensitive pads. Puzzles enter the realm of single-solution hyper-linearity, and regularly touch on the remedial: Fox McCloud encounters an obstacle, and finds the means to overcome it within easy, nearby reach. Fox McCloud saves the world. It's a mini adventure.



Combat is a stilted affair and fails to spice up the bread-crumb following exploration. There are some elaborate combos, but why bother when enemies fall just as easily with button-bashing?

Lazy like a fox, rather than requiring the use of vulpine cunning, it would seem. It may suggest that it's pitched at the younger audience, but that wouldn't explain away the teen rating on the cover of the packaging, or the patches of illogic. Why do barrels take two hits to smash open? Why are airborne enemies, the most frustrating to combat, immune to lock-on attack? It points instead to absent-minded game design, and it's a stark contrast to the production values evident elsewhere.

Values, such as the excellent camera and control system. The view isn't operated with the C-stick (which is used to call up a Rolodex inventory, a considerate and non-intrusive system), but the left trigger, which positions the camera behind you. Despite this lack of tangibility, camera problems are generally absent, except during boss battles where it becomes utterly dysfunctional. The handling of the main character is equally sure-footed and laudable, too.

So it's a shame that combat is such a spartan and repetitive experience. There's an ultra-polite lock-on that's invoked automatically whenever your weapon is drawn. You can only fight one assailant at a time, and there's no way to actively switch between them. It's a moot point, however, as only the targeted enemy will bother to attack. The others wait patiently in line like gentlemen, making confrontations feel reserved, turn-based and limited to pointlessly flamboyant button-basher combos. It's almost as typically British as the wide range of UK accents present in the voice acting.

Previously in **E**99, **E**112







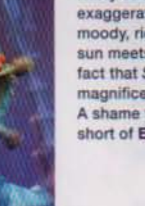


Fox McCloud's impressive staff is not just on display to scare the natives. You can use it to trigger switches and stun multiple enemies





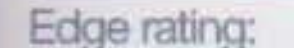




Every outdoor environment is subjected to an exaggerated *Zelda*-style day/night cycle, where moody, rich hues wash over the location as the sun meets or leaves the horizon. It reinforces the fact that *Star Fox Adventures* is one of the most magnificent looking GameCube titles to date. A shame then that gameplay falls considerably short of **Edge**'s (admittedly high) expectations

The tremendous looks on offer are the driving force behind the game, and they are the only incentive to spur the player on to uncover what the next corner has to offer. It's a 3D action adventure, but one that only truly offers the 3D aspect to any degree of beauty and involvement. Comparisons to *Zelda* are redundant as, at best, it's just *Zelda*-lite.

Once the heady visual buzz wears off, you'll be left with a sobriety of perfunctory puzzling and little else. Lose the plural in the title; there's only one adventure here, and it never feels like yours. There's no sense of exploration or discovery, just progression along a beautifully ornate straight line. There's no thought required, just legwork. You never really get to play, only play along. Is that your idea of an adventure?



Edge rating: Six out of ten



Dino crisis

You're accompanied on your travails by a young triceratops by the name of Tricky, prince of the Earthwalker tribe, and wisecracking heir to the throne. He's a bearable sidekick and he follows his simple command list with aplomb. But it's just one of the features of *Star Fox Adventures* that feels completely underexploited; he can be used as a counterweight for switches, and is happy to indulge in a game of fetch, but the rest of his abilities feel trivial and slightly dim. More teamwork between the pair would have elevated the coupling beyond the functional arranged marriage that it is.

The Lord of the Rings, The Two Towers

Format: **PS2 (version tested), Xbox (US only)** Publisher: **Electronic Arts** Developer: **In-house/Stormfront Studios** Price: **£45** Release: **November 8**

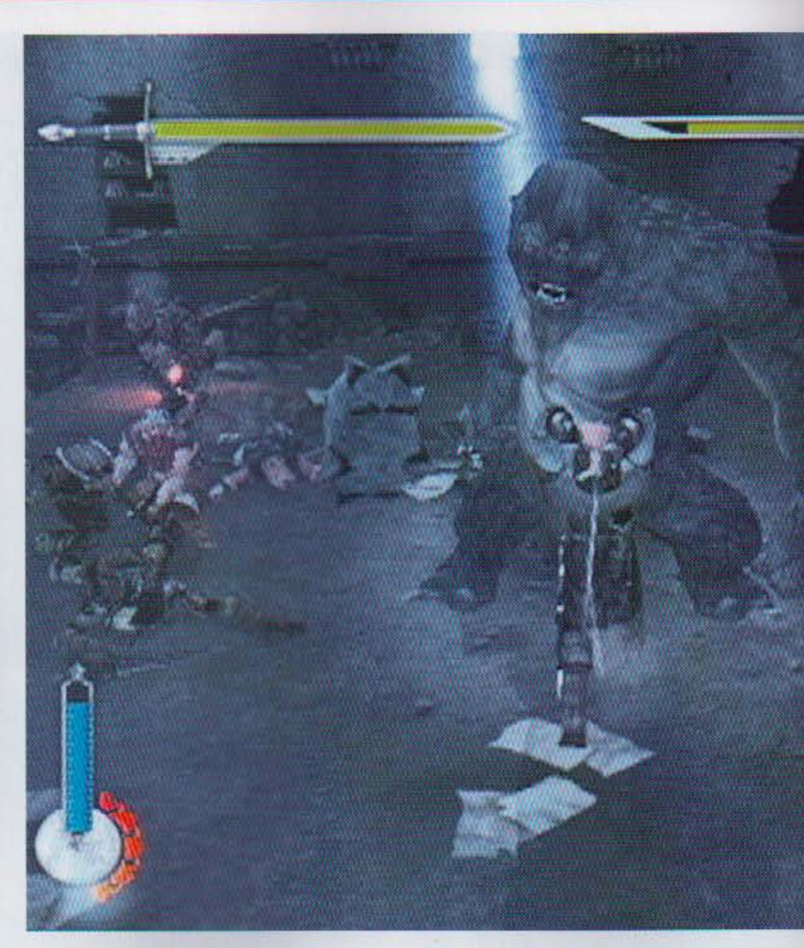




The better you perform in combat, the higher your kills are graded, resulting in more points with which to upgrade

Most readers will already be aware of the esteem in which **Edge** holds the first instalment of Peter Jackson's 'The Lord of the Rings' trilogy. For those that aren't: **Edge** didn't like it. Rest assured though, that **Edge**'s peculiar (or as we prefer to think of it, discerning) cinematic taste won't influence this review of the first instalment in EA's videogame adaptation. Partly because of a desire to keep **Edge**'s reviews free of any bias, but also, and largely, because *The Two Towers* is one of the most sophisticated videogame film tie-ins since *GoldenEye*, albeit for a very different set of reasons.

It doesn't, for example, boast the paradigmatic level design, or sublimely balanced mechanics of Rare's FPS, though the gameplay at the heart of *The Two Towers* experience is enjoyable and well wrought in its own right. No, what sets it apart from the broad mass of other videogames based on films is that this playable component is but one part of a broader experience that builds on its source material excellently, drawing the player into an authentically and atmospherically realised retelling of the original tale. Indeed it is perhaps the closest that a developer has yet come to matching the cinematic vision of its source material (even closer than *Rocky*, reviewed last issue), and it certainly expands upon it.



The fidelity with which EA has recreated the characters, environments and plot developments of Peter Jackson's first two 'Lord of the Rings' films is both astonishing and (to Edge) surprisingly satisfying

"While the game itself isn't groundbreaking, the overall experience is, and as a package it's unlikely to disappoint – even if you hated the film"





Some of the Uruk-Hai prove particularly difficult to beat, which does undermine several otherwise well-executed levels

Fans of the celluloid version will be drawn in immediately by the technical brilliance with which the film has been used. The action is framed by cut-scenes that transform almost unnoticeably from sequences of the film itself into EA's own digitally animated versions, and the game closely follows the plot of the first two movies. Thus, eager fans will be able to take a sneak preview of Frodo and co's further adventures, which take in environments such as Fangorn Forest and the homesteads of the Rohirrim before reaching a suitably dramatic conclusion at the battle of Helm's Deep. 'Howard Shore's Academy Award-winning musical score' is also reprised while the original cast provide their vocal talents (see Lord of the extra things) and locations and character models are rendered with an almost unprecedented realism on PlayStation2.

Even for non-believers (such as **Edge**), these elements are wielded with skill to immerse and reward the player, and in the context of a videogame, hammy acting, incessant music and a lack of decent characterisation don't seem nearly as irritating as they were in the cinema. In any case, the interactive parts of the game provide a solid experience, recreating key set-pieces from the films, such as Isildur's encounter with Sauron, and Aragorn's encounter with the Ringwraiths at Weathertop. The emphasis throughout is on massive numbers of enemies and fast and furious action. And taking the part of Aragorn, Gimli or Legolas, players can use upgrade points to earn new combos and superior weaponry.

Nevertheless, *The Two Towers* is let down by some significant flaws. Although the design of some missions is inspired, some levels are very poorly balanced, and the set-piece structure results in an unnecessary sense of stricture in places. Boss encounters, in particular, suffer from a slightly ill-considered sense of pacing. But the major criticism is that there is a disconnection between collision detection and its visual representation, undermining an otherwise satisfying combo system. It's certainly not enough to fatally undo the rest of EA's good work, but it does cause some easily preventable bouts of frustration.

Still, while the game itself isn't entirely groundbreaking, the overall experience is, and as a package it's unlikely to disappoint – even if you hated the film. Which is high praise indeed.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten















The set-piece nature of the game's level design allows for some incredibly well-conceived sections, but also contributes to an uneven sense of rhythm, and some equally badly implemented moments



Ardent fans will probably be tumescent with excitement at the prospect of an early glimpse of scenes and settings from 'The Two Towers', such as Fangorn Forest and the plains of the Rohirrim

Lord of the extra things

Following the feature-laden lead of the DVD release of 'The Fellowship of the Ring', EA has included a host of extras with *The Two Towers*. A number are available from the outset, such as interviews with Peter Jackson and Sir Ian McKellen about the making of the film and the game. Others, such as more cast interviews, artwork and photography, are unlocked by playing through the game with each character, increasing the replay value considerably. And regular readers will be pleased to hear that the quality of voice acting is much better than that of most other videogames.



Unreal Tournament 2003

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Infogrames** Developer: **Epic/Digital Extremes** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**





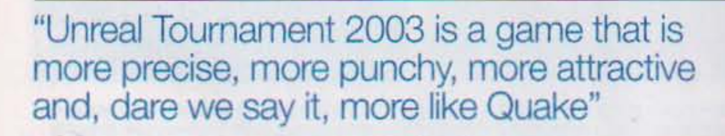


The visual effects in *Unreal Tournament 2003* go far beyond those presently supported by PC graphics cards

The hook is *sport*. That's what they want you to believe. Multiplayer deathmatch games are now being called 'e-sports', at least by an 'elite' gaming set who want to see a sponsored professional strata building up as a phenomenon over and above massmarket gaming. Given the staggering levels of obsession that the PC deathmatch games have inspired, such a reality doesn't seem so far away. The Websites and the players are there, all that's lacking are the games that will grasp the audience.

Epic and its licensees, Digital Extremes, have developed *Unreal Tournament 2003* with this in mind. The major new game mode, Bombing Run, is most definitely aiming to pick up ball-based sports vibes from the players, and the staggering visuals are more TV friendly than ever before. In fact the very name, with its 2003 moniker, suggests that Epic wants to set up a franchise with the same scope as Electronic Arts' *FIFA* games. Fortunately, this ambitious and beautiful game is also a capable and exhilarating reinstatement of the genre, and it might just begin to realise those dreams.

Unreal Tournament 2003 has learned much from the struggles of 1999. The original *Unreal Tournament* came away from its conflict with *Quake III Arena* much stronger; the flaws became visible and they've been addressed in this latest version. The result is a game that is more precise,



"Unreal Tournament 2003 is a game that is more precise, more punchy, more attractive and, dare we say it, more like Quake"



All of the weapons support *Unreal Tournament*'s trademark dual-fire mode. The chaingun, for exampl now fires a slower rate of explosive rounds, while the rocket launcher can fire three shells at once

more punchy, more attractive and, dare we say it, more like *Quake*.

Everything in *UT2003* speaks of refinement, from the interface inwards. The game modes have received some close attention. Domination consists of tagging two areas of a map and holding them for ten seconds, while Bombing Run is American football with guns. Deathmatch and Capture the Flag modes remain the stalwarts and are supported by some impressive mapping.

This level design is not always as good as it could be, but that may become a moot point as soon as dozens of user-made maps and a free Epic-sponsored map update hit the Internet. And you won't have to be Net-enabled to enjoy *UT2003* either, because the singleplayer support with AI-controlled bots, is a solid and engaging game in its own right.

The weaponry has been overhauled too, giving the player a greater feeling of control and skill, while still offering the diversity of the original title. There's some amusing innovation here, including a new satellite-strike super-weapon and a 'Ghostbusters'-style 'cross the beams' link-gun. Gone is the over-powered sniper rifle, and in its place a high-powered lightning gun, delivering a spectacular electric bolt with precision.

And it's beautiful. There's not a grain of doubt that *UT2003* is one of the most visually impressive games on any format. Of course, like all beauty, this lavish eye-candy comes with a price: lower spec PCs will simply not be able to compete without stripping away all the technological trickery that makes *UT2003* so interesting to look at. This aesthetic experience is dented a little by the hooted taunts and ludicrous Americanised Net-speak but, pleasingly, you can turn that off.

UT2003 doesn't offer any surprises, but then no one wanted to be surprised: everyone wanted to be *satisfied*. *UT2003* had to be comfortable and polished. It provides a shiny new ball to play with, as well as a new ballpark to play in, making players pleased the rules of the game have remained the same. They won't be short of people to play with either, because *UT2003* is going to be the only new game of its kind for some time to come.

Edge rating: **Eight** out of ten







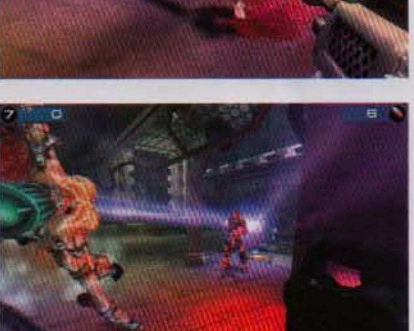


The wealth of detail presented on all *UT2003*'s levels is simply staggering. The dynamic for actual play, however, sometimes lags behind









Games such as *UT2003* are driving the PC technology market, providing actual uses for graphics cards that are presently way ahead of the available games

Eyes flight

The inventiveness of players is never to be doubted. In the original *Unreal Tournament* players discovered that the personal teleporter could be used as a weapon by teleporting *inside* opponents. This has been removed from *Unreal Tournament 2003*, thanks to a delay, but a new camera function means that the device will develop entirely new functions of its own as players hurl it into areas of the map, checking out the possible dangers ahead and acting as a scout for flag and ball carriers in the various gametypes.

Colin McRae Rally 3

Format: **PlayStation2, Xbox** Publisher: **Codemasters** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**



While you expect trees to put up a fight, some of the smaller bushes appear to take a suspicious amounts of speed from your car. Track design forces you to face the same decisions as WRC drivers



You don't get to see an awful lot of Colin himself and during service areas you don't get involved with the actual work being carried out which can make you feel a bit alienated – until you're driving again





Damage, and particularly the way bonnets, doors, boots and bumpers bounce around, is superbly conveyed. Both versions offer an anamorphic option. (Shots on this page are Xbox, PlayStation2 shown on opposite page)

The last outing in the Focus WRC alongside Nicky Grist, then (rally fans will be aware of McRae's latest career moves which see him split from both his current team and co-driver). And what a fine final ride it is. Stylishly presented, Codemasters' promise that *Colin McRae Rally 3* would get you closer to rallying than anything before it certainly seems to have been kept as McRae – sorry – *you* line your Focus on the official starting gate to mark the beginning of your campaign: three years, six rallies per year, seven stages per rally.

It's then on to the service area, beautifully recreated and wonderfully detailed (everyone has been motion captured, McRae can be seen being interviewed by the press, etc) and possibly only rivalled in quality by *V-Rally 3*'s representation. Here you can obviously tweak the car's handling though you'll notice that not all options are initially available. Getting these upgrades (eg turbo, super light chassis, power dampers, super maxi engine) is a matter of progressing through the championship. It's a great reward structure and a way of maintaining high player interest.

"Grist's notes flow effortlessly from one bend to the next, an almost exact replica of when you see him sat in the real Focus WRC"

Once you're happy with your settings McRae and Grist drive to the start of the stage while you follow their progress on the loading screen and then you're McRae again. Immediately, things feel comfortably familiar. The trademark oversteer-friendly model makes an enhanced return, emerging as a natural evolution of *CMR2.0*'s. As this is a dual-format review, it's worth noting that a difference between the two versions is noticeable in that the Xbox model displays a slightly harsher, more digital interpretation with **Edge** finding it necessary to slow down the steering speed at the next service area in order to compensate for this. PS2 owners can ignore this step and immediately revel in the best console rally physics model around.

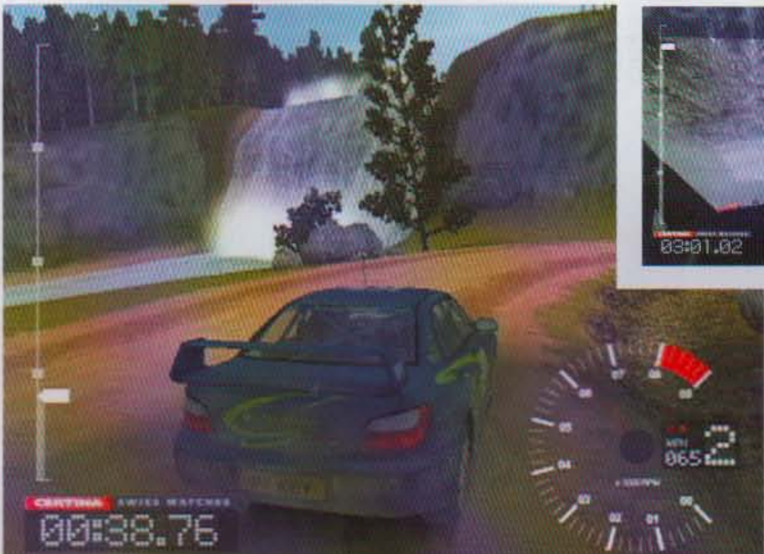
As with the prequels, its superiority lies in the way it involves the driver and the detailed feedback you get from the varying surfaces the vehicle is made to negotiate. In fairness, joypad vibration could be applied more liberally (stopping short of the excess evident in *WRC II Extreme* – see p102) but even when used this faintly you're never left wondering what the wheels are up to.

Completing the illusion is the best set of pace notes **Edge** has had the pleasure to listen to. Having Grist record them individually for each stage has made a substantial difference – where *WRCII*'s monosyllabic delivery gets the job done in an abrupt but functional manner, Grist's notes flow effortlessly from one bend to the next, an almost exact replica of when you see him sat in the real Focus WRC.

The lack of a licence has its drawbacks (McRae, Grist and the Focus are the only official 2002 elements in here) but it does allow for the inclusion of non-WRC stages such as the Japan and US additions to the otherwise usual list of rallies found in Codemasters' franchise. It also frees up the developer to create its own track designs and imaginative and brave they are too, delivering as wide a range of hazards as

Previously in E111, E115



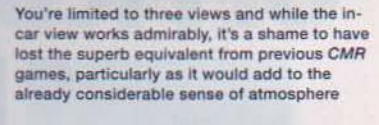












You're limited to three views and while the in-car view works admirably, it's a shame to have lost the superb equivalent from previous *CMR* games, particularly as it would add to the already considerable sense of atmosphere

you'd expect, although nothing comes close to *WRCII*'s superb official offerings. Still, one noticeable advantage is the inclusion of 'open junctions' where, unless you've been paying attention to Grist, you're not likely to know which direction to point your bonnet.

This is where *CMR3* excels. The detail of the car model, the superb sound (particularly the Xbox's 5.1 mix), Grist's commentary, the class-leading handling and the non-linear stages combine to recreate a convincing depiction of rallying. Often, you'll find yourself questioning your recollection of Grist's instructions and panic sets in, as you scan the scenery for clues as to what the road may be doing on the other side of the crest. It matters. It matters because a bad result could jeopardise the championship (the auto save feature prevents cheating). And when you care that much, you know you're dealing with something special.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten



Focused experience

While *CMR3* doesn't have access to the official 2002 WRC cars it does offer some familiar faces dressed in new decals. Furthermore, some interesting models show up every time you win a rally (above) so the final selection isn't as restrictive as it initially seems. Other than the main game mode, both versions offer single stage and multiplayer options (twoplayer for PS2, and two more on top for Xbox owners). With the exception of handling (see main text) differences between the two versions have been kept to a minimum (even visually).





Attention to detail is beyond criticism – on dusty rallies the air intake on the bonnet becomes increasingly dusty (left). Dust plume effects are good, but not as good as those in *WRCII*, though

Dead to Rights

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Namco** Developer: **In-house (Namco Hometek)** Price: **$50 (£32)** Release: **Out now (US), TBC (UK)** Previously in **E101**, **E112**

A corrupt city, a dead father, a cop wronged, lots of guns, silly body counts, and dreadful acting. *Dead to Rights* could – perhaps *should* – be a dreadful low-budget TV film, and it often behaves like one. **Edge** wonders how much of it is tongue in cheek, and how much is a genuine lack of creativity on the part of Namco's US development team. The pastiche may be cheap, effective humour, but there are not too many laughs here.

But then it's unlikely most players will buy this for the plot; it is essentially a schizophrenic adrenaline-fuelled thirdperson action adventure, as dumb as they come but with a few neat ideas. The two major components of the game switch it between thirdperson shooting and unarmed combat. Shoot-out sections rely less on aiming and more on speed of thought: the right trigger locks your chosen weapon to a nearby enemy, and X pulls the trigger. To compensate for the simplicity, *Dead to Rights* is hard, and defeating each separate set-piece means taking advantage of the game's smart gimmicks: using enemies as human shields, *Max Payne*-style bullet-time or throwing fire extinguishers at enemies and shooting them in mid-air.

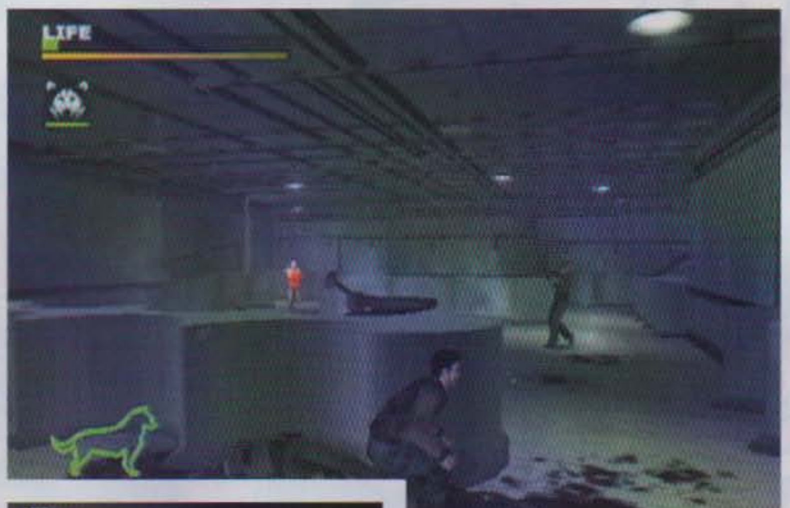
If the player character runs out of ammunition, he can command his dog to attack an enemy and retrieve their weapon, or use one of the game's signature disarm moves on a nearby opponent. These are cinematic and brutal ways of disposing of enemies, and add to the game's B-movie feel. There are larger sections of pure hand-to-hand combat, too, which provide separate buttons for kick, punch, block and throw, and rudimentary combos. Comparisons could be drawn with *The Bouncer* – there's little subtlety to the system, but as a change of pace from the gunplay, it is successful.

And changing pace is what the game does really well, because there are a substantial number of other diversions on offer (see Fatal distraction). None of them are excellent, but as part of something wider they're entertaining, offering ample incentive to push yourself through the punishing difficulty level. It is a game that just about manages to be more than the sum of its parts; *Dead to Rights* is a bad, bad film, sure, but it is a reasonably entertaining videogame.

Edge rating: Six out of ten









Level three sees the victimised cop imprisoned on death row. Making an escape requires a winning series of improbable fist-fights







The camera proves unwieldy, although the auto targeting makes it less of a problem. It's at its most frustrating in confined spaces – parts of a later level, set onboard an aircraft, will irritate many players



Fatal distraction

Dead to Rights isn't afraid to tear the player away from their punch/kick/shoot expectations. One section of a level alternates between an on-rails section with you gunning down people in a helicopter, and a bomb defusing mini-game where the object is to guide a pin through a cylindrical maze within a time limit and without it touching the sides. Another has you playing Jack's dog, Shadow, and sniffing out bombs placed around a building. And the rhythm action pole dancing, where the player tries to distract thugs away from the game's hero, is poorly executed but silly enough to amuse.

Red Faction II

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **THQ** Developer: **Volition** Price: **£40** Release: **November 15** Previously in **E**112, **E**116

There's a moment in *Red Faction II* that makes you gasp. It makes you gasp because, for the most part, the rest of the game is uninspired. While searching inside yet another grey building and gunning down some more clockwork troops, you happen upon a mobile armour unit. But it's not just part of the scenery, it's one you can climb inside and spend the majority of the level annihilating enemies from a firstperson perspective with huge rockets. While *Red Faction* also allowed you to commandeer vehicles, the transition from foot to cockpit is handled much better in the sequel.

Indeed, everything has been honed just that bit more in *Red Faction II*. Environment detail is higher, there's a more intelligent autosave facility (which does away with the hideous loading times so prevalent in the first game), and the multiplayer games are far superior (see Custom cannons). But these elements are still not enough to raise the experience into distinguished territory.

Part of the problem is that the much-vaunted Geo-Mod technology still feels like a gimmick. Rarely do you find a hidden room or a slight variation in the route after blasting through scenery. Obvious signposting, such as cracks in the wall, draw your attention to the areas where Geo-Mod can be exploited and the idea that it fundamentally alters strategising is far-fetched. While blowing chunks out of concrete and flesh is fun for a while, it palls towards the end of the game.

The AI is also retarded and when you restart a section after a death you'll know exactly where to shoot to improve chances second time round. And the notion that the enemies in the game are 'nano' enhanced, and so have little free will, is an unconvincing argument for their predictable behaviour.

On a positive note, there are some excellent weapons and intelligent selection is vital for progress. From the Military Assault Rifle to the Nanotech Grenade Launcher, each has a purpose and, in combination with hand-grenades, the devastation you can wreak is impressive. Volition has also taken the rechargeable shield seen in *Halo*. It's not quite as important to the gameplay, partly because health packs are too abundant, but it adds a little hide-and-shoot tension.

Red Faction II will not go down in history as a step forward for the genre, but it does offer an enjoyable single and multiplayer experience for PS2 owners.

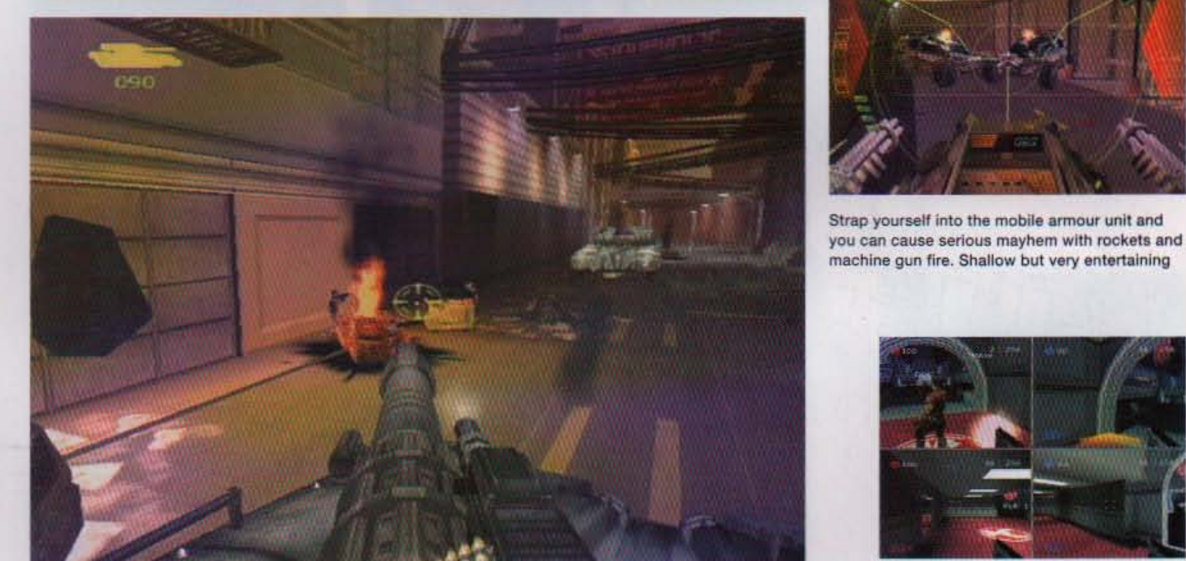
Edge rating: Six out of ten







Strap yourself into the mobile armour unit and you can cause serious mayhem with rockets and machine gun fire. Shallow but very entertaining







If anything, the game improves when you don't have access to weapons of mass destruction such as the Nanotech Grenade Launcher. Life is more tense when you only have the Military Assault Rifle to hand



Custom cannons

It may fall short of the greatness that drips from every pore of *TimeSplitters2*, but *Red Faction II* still offers some great multiplayer fun. Framerates remain reasonably slick and steady, even in fourplayer mode, but the game also delivers a great deal of customisation to gamers. Bot 'personalities' can be created by setting variables such as aggression and tendency to camp levels and you can even give them a favoured weapon. It's also possible for you to team up with, or against, teams of bots with friends in games such as Bagman, Arena and standard Deathmatch.

World Rally Championship II Extreme

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **Evolution Studios** Price: £40 Release: **Novermber 29** Previously in **E**115, **E**116







The pace notes, compared with *CMR3*'s are quite robotic and lifeless. Also, they occasionally get called way too late which can be a problem







Silly extremes

While the licence naturally restricts what Evolution Studios can do with the game content, there are more options on offer here than in *CMR3*. Of particular mention are the Challenge mode and the Extreme version of the WRC cars (effectively turning them into the modern day equivalent of Group B, 700bhp monsters from the mid-'80s) that become available. Try these out on the game's extra (fictitious) courses for some very silly, very enjoyable moments.



Finally, the rally crowds have been sampled and their fog horns (or cow bells in Sweden) add much to the atmosphere (and they react to you, too). An anamorphic mode is included, as are twoplayer splitscreen and multiplayer options

Looking like a playable version of the new Channel 4 (and usual Eurosport) WRC coverage, Evolution Studios' second attempt at taking the videogame rally title from Codemasters' *Colin McRae* franchise (see p96) looks stronger this year. Thankfully, it has also altered significantly since **Edge** last saw it (see **E**116). It's now more on track to continue where last year's *WRC* left off, rather than attempting to dumb down the content in an attempt to secure a wider audience – the licence will do that, after all.

What does it do better than *Colin*, then? Well, the most obvious aspect is the stage design. Based on the real thing, *WRCII*'s rally segments are demanding but never fail to deliver exquisite moments of rally action. Furthermore, the sense of elevation is also without rival – try Monte Carlo, Argentina or Greece for a vertigo-inducing experience – while the draw distance continues to impress. There's a better selection of cameras, too, including a superb TV-style, in-car option (though all internal views have an abating effect on the sense of speed), more confident engine sound (apart from the Focus) and mechanical failures seem more noticeable (through aural and/or handling alterations).

Conversely, *WRCII*'s physical damage implementation isn't as convincing as *CMR3*'s and during crashes the weight of the car isn't properly conveyed, destroying the illusion the game's other elements have worked hard to achieve. The handling model, while perfectly acceptable after an initial period of acclimatisation (it's worth noting that as in 2001's *WRC* things improve greatly with the addition of a force feedback wheel), just doesn't possess the breadth or delicacy of that of *CMR3*. In addition, trackside objects – particularly barriers – feel unfairly punitive and the overall environment tends to feel more angular, less organic. And if you're feeling picky you could point out that for a game that is so well presented the podium sequence is again dreadfully unrewarding and the service areas between stages are a little sparse and possess little in the way of atmosphere (the running clock for repair time is a nice touch but otherwise *CMR3* or indeed, *V-Rally 3* offer superior representations).

Certainly an improvement over last year's attempt then, and while not that different it does at least represent the obvious purchase for those keen to recreate the overall WRC experience in their living room.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Rally Fusion: Race of Champions

Format: PlayStation2 (version tested), Xbox, GC Publisher: Activision Developer: Climax Motorsports Price: £40 Release: November 15 (PS2), November 22 (Xbox), November (GC) Previously in E112

Given the road it has chosen to travel (that of the arcade rally experience), it would be unfair to expect *Rally Fusion* to rival reality-based heavyweight contenders such as *CMR3* and *WRC II Extreme* in a straight race. That's not to say it would be left stuck in neutral at the start gate – certainly technically, and particularly in terms of car modelling, **Edge** would expect to find Climax's effort at the top of the leaderboard. *Fusion*'s battle, as it pulls up alongside *RalliSport Challenge* (see **E**109) and *Shox* (**E**116) and throws them a cheeky wink, lies elsewhere though.

What *Fusion* has on its side is content. And structure. The licence to the Race of Champions event, an end-of-term meet (currently) in Gran Canaria for drivers of differing rally categories to go head to head in a super special stage, has resulted in an enjoyable but brief competition offering some very close racing as you become increasingly familiar with its single track (the knock-out nature of the proceedings can seem a little unfair at times). Yet the RoC mode is a mask – a foot in the door of the otherwise exclusive world of the big console racers for a very competent contender that wouldn't have secured a look in without a licence.

The main game is to be found in the RoC Challenge option, a series of events spread around the globe for you to tackle. The variety is more impressive than that of *RalliSport*, with hillclimb, rallycross, driving challenges, relay races and single rally stages making alternate appearances (occasionally in different gameplay guises) and the game is structured to entice you to open it all up.

There is one significant criticism, however. The handling model fails to match the quality of the game's other elements and as such causes it great damage. It's not as understeer-fixated as **Edge** found it to be in preview code but it hasn't gone enough the other way, meaning vehicles stick unrealistically to the road and plenty of handbrake (more than any other recent rally game) must be used to get the back end out. When it does, it tends to snap into oversteer and feels exaggerated resulting in a contrived effect. Matters certainly improve once access to the more volatile class-A cars becomes available but even then the handling robs much of the game's vivacity. Yet while it's certainly a sizeable dent, it's not one significant enough to completely damage an otherwise great chassis.

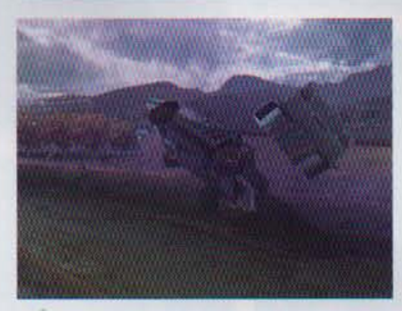
Edge rating: Seven out of ten













Physical modelling (including the way bodyparts behave) is among the best seen to date, easily matching that of *CMR3* (p96). But changes in road surfaces aren't as well conveyed as in, say, *RalliSport Challenge*



The twoplayer version (four for Xbox) keeps a surprising level of detail. Co-driver duties aren't as impressive and don't feel as natural as some of the competition's equivalents but having the pace notes fly out of the car can prove interesting



Shox treatment

Initial impressions aren't favourable. A limited set of options (no anamorphic, 60Hz or surround sound, for instance), clumsy menu progression, even the wrong choice of typography give the game a split identity – it clearly tries to cultivate a genuine arcade environment while hoping to out-do EA's presentation, but *Fusion* just doesn't have the speed to overtake that particular department of the world's biggest games publisher. Still, content saves the day.

Street Fighter Zero 3 Upper

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **Crawfish** Price: **¥4,800 (£25)** Release: **Out now (Japan), November 29 (UK)**

Previously in **E**102



Dragon punches are easily executed after an initial period of adjustment to the GBA's controls, though some players may have problems with the light punch on the left trigger. Reconfiguring takes moments; beating the game on level eight takes longer







Zero 3, reviewed in **E**69: "Ultimately just another reiteration of an ageing blueprint," began a jaded **Edge**. "Maddeningly playable," it finished, in love all over again. Rumours of development trauma didn't bode well for this, the GBA conversion of the *Upper* upgrade. But from the first dragon punch it's clear that this is a stunning piece of craft, as good as the console equivalents in every way that matters, and exceeding them in others – zero loading times, for example. The four-button limitation is dealt with efficiently; everything can be reassigned, with medium blows defaulting to simultaneous taps of light and heavy.

Besides, the calluses don't come from poor controls. They come from being unable to put the thing down; from practising for hours, and only scratching the surface of a game that is as deep as it is difficult as it is fast. It's testament to the GBA's power that it can cope with the most furious moments of Capcom's fighter without missing a beat, but it's also a tribute to the talent of the team which has harnessed that power. Crawfish's work proves that development hell can birth excellence. It also shows that, reiteration or not, maddeningly playable games don't age.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**

Super Mario Advance and its sequel both had their initial console incarnations before **Edge**'s time. The third in the series of handheld ports, *Yoshi's Island*, is the first that **Edge** has looked at before, back in **E**26. The GBA version is almost identical, and shows off the design that sets *Yoshi's Island* apart from run-of-the-mill *Mario* imitators. The Super FX effects are effortlessly incorporated into *Mario World*-style platforming, while the visuals are sumptuous, the zenith of 16bit beauty.

The level-based linearity may be weaker than *Super Mario World*'s world, but the rewards for collecting everything on a level compensate, encouraging persistent replay. And replaying it is a joy, regardless of whether this is your first time protecting Baby Mario or whether you managed to save him seven years ago. People complain about the slew of ports on the GBA, that publishers are failing to take advantage of the two-dimensional renaissance, but when the games are this good, it's difficult to complain with any real force. *Yoshi's Island* will introduce a new generation of players to platform creativity, and in an industry that uncomprisingly rejects archival works like MAME, it shows how important history really is.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

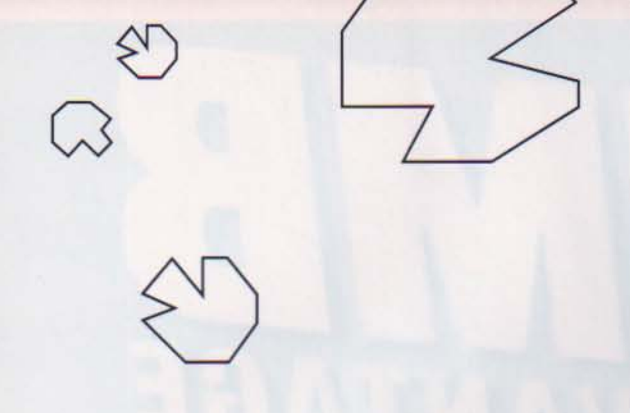








The major depature from *Super Mario World*'s pure platforming is Yoshi's ability to consume enemies and spit them out at an angle of the player's choosing. Eating melons makes the tiny dinosaur fire seeds, while other power-ups turn him into a helicopter and a tunnelling machine





The making of…

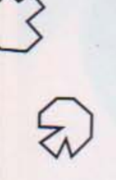
Asteroids

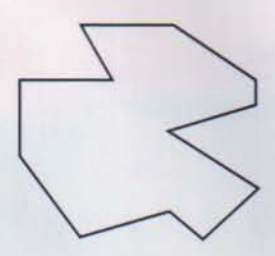
In the late '70s, space invaded videogames. However, while Japan delivered wave after wave of alien intruders, engineers at Atari's US HQ began to toy with less animated foe. And so a legend was born…

Original format:	**Arcade**
Manufacturer:	**Atari**
Developer:	**In-house**
Origin:	**US**
Original release date:	**1979**

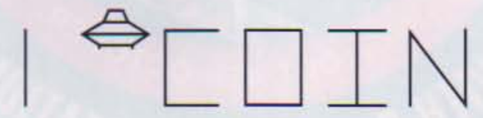


















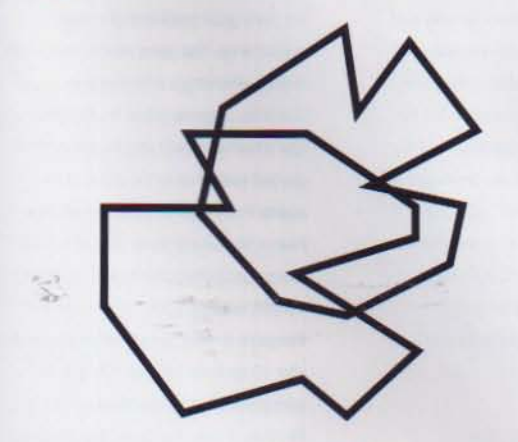
When Atari released *Asteroids* in 1979, the game did something that very few coin-operated arcade games had ever done before. It kept selling. Months after its introduction, when the sales cycle for an arcade game should have ended, its manufacturer kept receiving orders.

More than 70,000 units were sold, generating revenues of $150m (£97m) for Atari, and no one knows for sure how many coins the rock-splitting diversion sucked up, but Atari estimates it made more than $500m (£323m). Although orders have tapered off, the game's legacy lives on with innumerable arcade, home, and Web-based adaptations. This obsession, close to a quarter of a century old, owes its success to Atari programmer **Ed Logg** and a game that never took off.

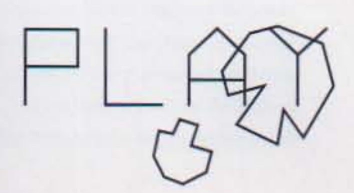
From failure comes…

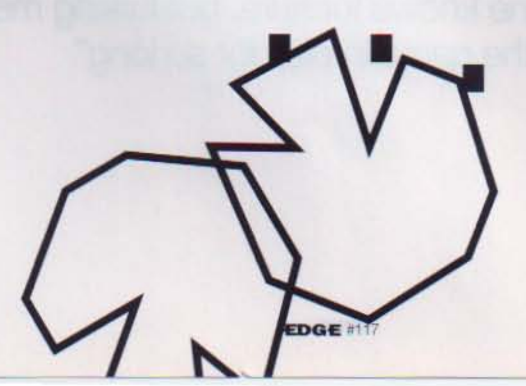
With the success of *Super Breakout*, Logg had established himself as a Super Duper Game Guy (it's the title on his current business card). **Lyle Rains**, the director of Atari's coin-op group, needed Logg's advice. The company was testing a game that featured a giant asteroid which couldn't be destroyed. Yet that didn't deter players. They kept shooting at the rock. According to Logg, "[Rains] felt that if people kept shooting at it maybe they really want to blow up asteroids. He said, 'Well, why don't we have a game where you shoot the rocks and blow them up?'"

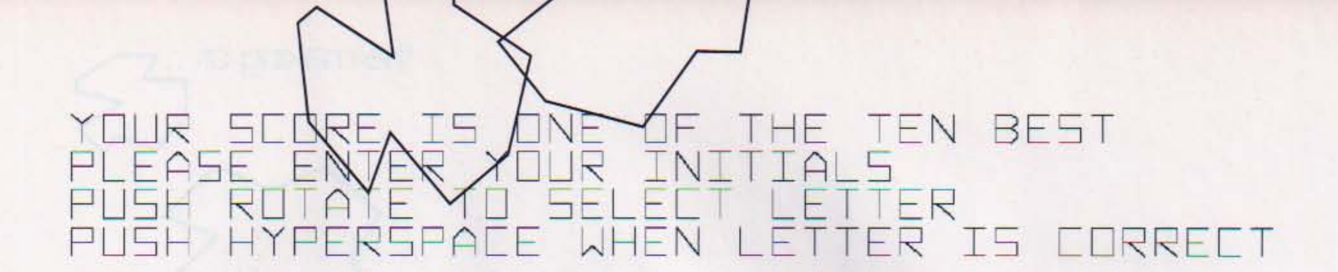
However, Logg was looking for a little more strategy. He responded to Rains' suggestion: "I'd really like to shoot the rocks and break them into smaller pieces because that way the player wouldn't shoot everything, he would selectively pick. He doesn't want to just randomly shoot because then you would have too many rocks flying around and it would be

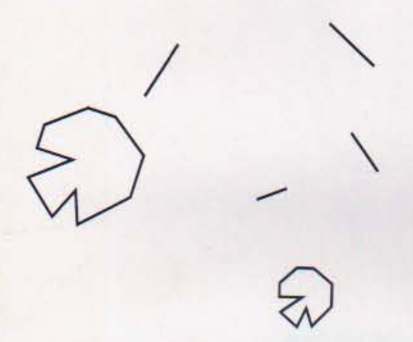














too damn dangerous." Logg knew that shooting rocks wouldn't be enough: "You needed to do something, otherwise the player would just fly around and leave one rock on the screen and there's no impetus to get you moving." Having seen flying saucers in the game *Spacewar!*, Logg suggested that they introduce a similar flying saucer to chase the player on to the next round.

The next consideration was the graphics format. "[Rains] wanted it on raster and I suggested XY monitor because it's higher resolution [1,024 x 760 versus raster's 320 x 240] and you need that resolution to see what angle you're shooting at. I was familiar with *Spacewar!*, the original vector game, and so I knew that the high resolution was required." Since Logg was on a streak with great ideas, Rains gave him the green light on XY monitor and everything else. Logg was dubbed *Asteroids*' programmer, project leader and artist. Also present in that first meeting was Howie Delman, who joined as engineer, and then Paul Mancuso joined the team as the game's technician.

Pain-free processing

Although developing coin-op games in the '70s was a laborious process, thanks to the complexity of the 6502 CPU, programming *Asteroids* was surprisingly pain free. The basic underlying routines for the existing XY hardware had already been used in Atari's *Lunar Lander*.

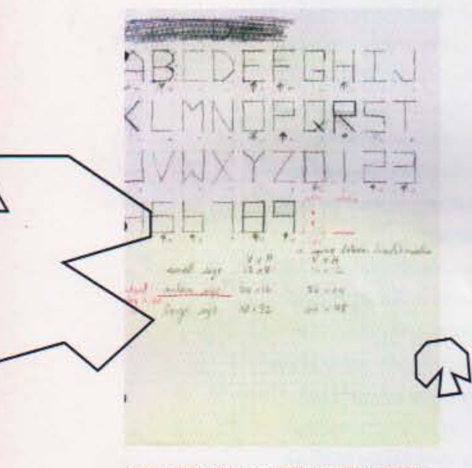
One game element that evolved after the initial *Asteroids* meeting was the division of the big saucer and the small saucer. Logg wanted two saucers with different roles, "The big saucer would come in: 'Shoot me, shoot me... I'm just going to take a few random shots... I'm cannon fodder.'" The small saucer would arrive after three big saucers. Its firing would be more focused than that of the big saucer. Throughout gameplay, the two would randomly switch appearances. Attain a certain score and you'd only see the small saucer. "Once your score got higher and higher the saucer would come in and shoot faster and faster and faster and faster until you reached some maximum limit," says Logg, "[Reach that limit and] the spaceship is probably coming in as fast as he can, he's shooting as fast he can, and there's an angle range that he shoots you at and it slowly decreases until he is extremely accurate." *Asteroids* maxes out in complexity somewhere between 40,000 and 60,000 points. Logg has reached that range and beyond. He's taken the machine to 99,999 points.

And... success

After only two years of programming games, Logg had already witnessed patterns within Atari that hinted at a game's impending success, "I could tell when late in the project people would come in and bug you: 'Can I play the game now? Can I play the game now?' Or you'd leave for the night, come back and the hi-score table would be full." While all were good indicators, accolades from fellow engineers are rarely good predictors of market performance. The game needed real-world testing, which it got in Sacramento, California. Logg describes the first time he saw a normal person play his game, "First guy just walked up to the game, put a quarter in and died instantly. It must have been a 15-second game. And he turned around and put another quarter in. And for me that was like, 'Okay, I know now that this game is okay.' Usually when people die after 15 seconds they say, 'Oh shit, the game's too hard,' and walk away. But in this case, it was clear to me that the player said, 'I screwed up, I can do better.' And that's what you want to see in a game."

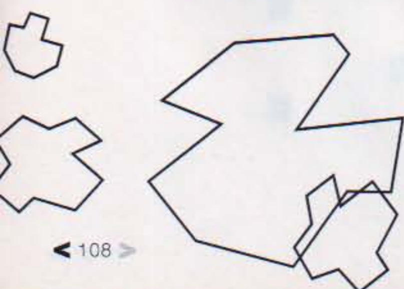
The lure of the lurk

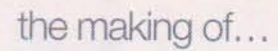
"The initial game design was set up so that as soon as the saucer came in he would take a shot," says Logg. "And most people would hear the saucer sound first, and try to locate him. By this time of course the saucer has already taken a shot and if you

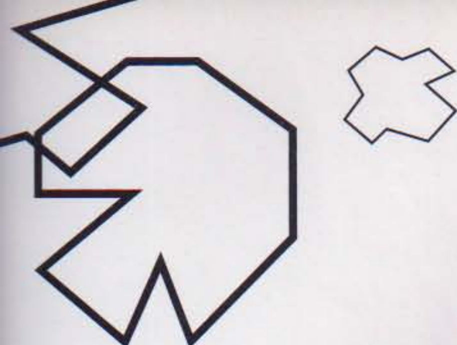


Logg created his own font using the game's vector graphics, taking care to ensure that certain profane combinations of letters would not register on the hi-score table

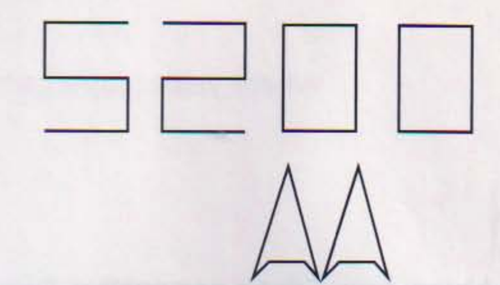
"Experts wanted to lurk and show off. Others wanted to imitate the masters and learn to lurk. No one knows for sure, but lurking may have been the factor that kept the game in play for so long"

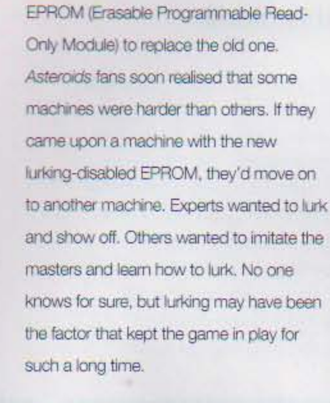


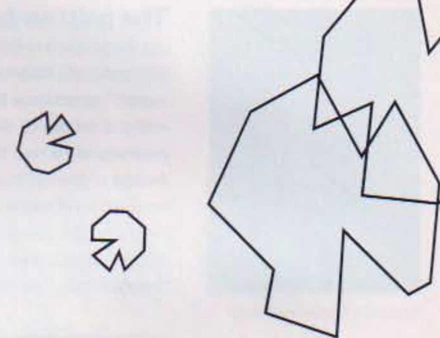












weren't paying attention or unlucky he could nail you before you even had a chance to do anything. So it was felt, and I agreed, that the saucer had to wait a little while before he took a shot at you. This opened the doors to the whole lurking strategy." Logg wasn't too concerned, since he tried to master lurking and was unsuccessful, so he felt nobody could do it. But that 'delay before firing' did result in the development of lurking, and Logg finally figured out how to do it himself.

Players used lurking to impress their friends. Operators started to complain about lost revenue. In response, Logg and his team created a new 'lurk-limiting' EPROM (Erasable Programmable Read-Only Module) to replace the old one. *Asteroids* fans soon realised that some machines were harder than others. If they came upon a machine with the new lurking-disabled EPROM, they'd move on to another machine. Experts wanted to lurk and show off. Others wanted to imitate the masters and learn how to lurk. No one knows for sure, but lurking may have been the factor that kept the game in play for such a long time.

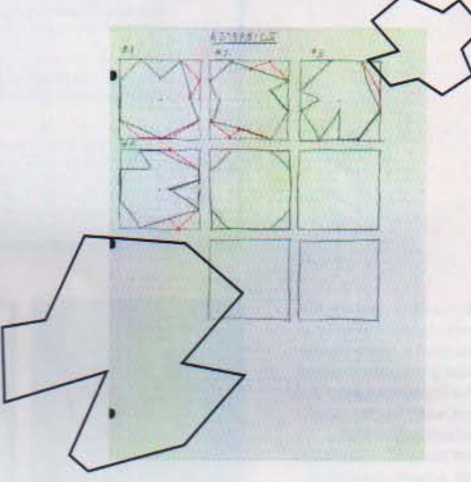
The extra-life crash

Get good enough at *Asteroids* and the game slows down; Logg had no idea that players were going to cap his resources. It's a programming error that Logg admits to, "I should have limited the number of the player spaceships to ten or something. But I drew so many across the top of the screen and I kept drawing them off the edge of the screen that the game actually slowed down." Build 50 to 100 lives and the game will begin to crawl.

Collect more than 250 lives and you may lose your game. It's the fault of the machine's watchdog circuit. To stay operational, coin-operated arcade units need a periodic response from the program. The watchdog circuit tells the machine that the game is still working. If too much time passes and the program doesn't receive a response, the watchdog circuit will think the game's dead and it will reboot.

Logg definitely yearns for the earlier days of game developing where he only dealt with one or two people instead of 30 and it only took a few weeks instead of a year and a half to develop a prototype. He still develops games today with the same group of developers from the late '70s – now known as Midway Games West. At the end of this year, the team will release *Dr Muto*, a character-based action adventure game for the PS2, Xbox, and GameCube.

Asteroids has been a major part of Logg's life. He used to play the game in his sleep. When he mentions it to people, he often gets the response, "Oh, so you're responsible for all my lost milk money." Logg, however, doesn't accept responsibility. That's not to say he wouldn't give *Asteroids* credit for his marriage: in an odd twist, before he ever met his wife, she already owned a coin-op *Asteroids* in her home.



Yes, early art design really was this basic. Although the concept was simple, the extra level of strategy introduced when asteroids split apart made Logg's game compulsive











RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 53, Christmas 1997

The gold embossing signalled something big. **Edge** was the first magazine to secure a visit to the impossibly shy Rare for ten years. "So what's the secret?" asked issue **E**53, the question coming at the end of a verbose 67-word coverline. But it wasn't a prophecy of the next millennium's Microsoft's rumours, instead a "how do they do that?" on the British devco's track record of quality. The Stampers weren't revealing much, though, playing the interview with caution. What did they expect to be doing in five years? "Pretty much the same thing," replied Chris. Only on Xbox, naturally.

Edge's exposé of rhythm action ("The very idea of a new genre seemed unbelievable… heaven knows where it'll end.") was more of a surprise, as was the lead revelation in the news section. "PS/N64 Beater Unveiled At VM Labs" ran the story, with a screenshot of Minter's "Online Ovine" demo, and a picture of ex-Atari employees grinning through their beards. But the last word goes to Eugene Jarvis, eulogising producers at Develop! 97, "We necromancers of the 'Wired' generation breathe life into the dead pixel clay." Right. See what hyperspace does to your head?

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?
"We are working on the game of the millennium. Interested?" declares Confounding Factor's recruitment advert. Which millennium would that be exactly, Toby?

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?
"New Genre Alert!" A rare exclamation mark on the cover reveals **Edge**'s excitement at discovering rhythm action.

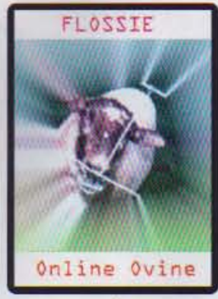
TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)
Diddy Kong Racing (N64, 9/10); *Blade Runner* (PC, 9/10); *The Curse of Monkey Island* (PC, 8/10); *Crash Bandicoot 2* (PS, 6/10); *Pandemonium 2* (PS, 5/10); *Cool Boarders 2: Killing Session* (PS, 7/10); *TOCA Touring Car* (PS, 8/10); *Test Drive 4* (PS, 6/10); *Uprising* (PC, 8/10); *Sonic R* (Saturn, 8/10); *Sega Touring Car Championship* (Saturn, 5/10); *All Japan Pro Wrestling* (Saturn, 7/10); *Dead or Alive* (Saturn, 8/10)



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1. *Bust-a-Move*, leading the way for rhythm action. New genre alert! 2. *Blade Runner*: the last great point 'n' click? 3. The Stampers survey their estate, watching the skies for intruding journalists 4. Jeff Minter's original Nuon demo. Anyone would think he's obsessed with sheep 5. *Dead or Alive*: simply the breast back then 6. The 'Daily Star's virtual girlfriend, Glamogotchi Jo Guest

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, Violet Berlin, producer at WhizzBang TV, remembers blagging a rare game





"Subversive", "intelligent" and "self-aware", *Chrono Trigger* was indeed something of a rarity

Watching pictures of the Stamper brothers handing over the keys to their company to Microsoft at X02 in Seville recently took me back to earlier times, places and consoles. Reporting the first glimpse of the N64 from Japan, buzzing after playing *Mario 64*, I got talking to Tim Stamper and his fellow Rare-ites, about other gaming greats. They raved about an RPG on the newly-defunct SNES, called *Chrono Trigger*. Then they sent me a copy.

When a design team go out of their way to get you to play a game created by another developer, you might expect that game to be very special, but I didn't expect it to be so very subversive.

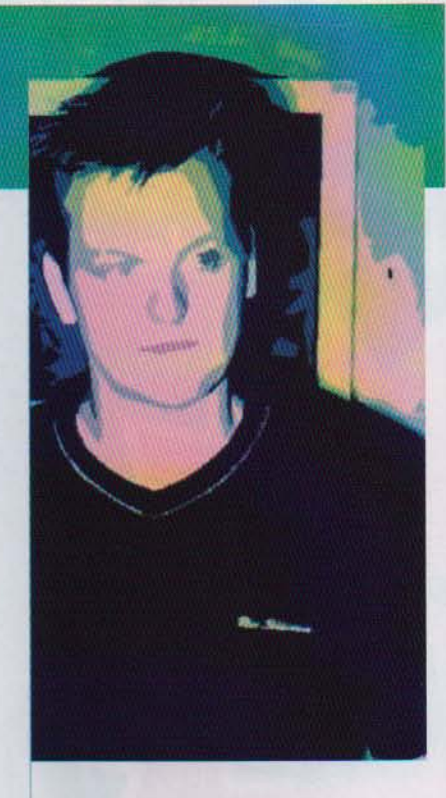
Never has a game shocked me as *Chrono Trigger* did. Not with gore, or violence, but by having an intelligent story, and by turning gaming clichés on their head. I won't spoil it, but let's just say that, an hour or so into the game I entered a courtroom. The trial there so stunned me that I instantly restarted just to see what would happen if I'd played the game in a slightly different way. Twice.

It's a self-aware game that seemed to be aware of me too. And whereas people think of it as an early RPG by *Final Fantasy* house, Square, as far as I'm concerned it was another great SNES game brought to me by the mighty, mighty Rare.



FAQ

Guy Wilday
studio head, Codemasters



Looking after the Colin McRae licence since the first game appeared in 1998 and having just put the finishing touches to the third iteration (p96), Wilday and his (substantial) team are probably already working on modelling the Xsara (after McRae's recent signing with Citroën for the 2003 WRC season).

What was the first videogame you played?
The first videogame I can remember playing was a homebrew *Pong* kit that my Dad built. Simple but immediately addictive.

What was the first computer/games machine you owned?
The first computer was an Apple II. I can remember my Dad buying it to do his accounts on but I don't remember it doing much accounting. Games I specifically remember spending lots of time on were *Choplifter* and *Wizardry*.

What was the first thing you ever created for a computer or console?
I can remember writing a *Breakout* type game for the Apple II. I really just used it to try things out rather than attempt full scale projects.

What was your first job in the industry, and what was the first thing you ever designed?
My first job in the games industry was at Codemasters where I was employed as the producer of *Colin McRae Rally*.

What's your favourite game ever, and why?
My favourite game ever has to be *Super Mario 64*. I remember being completely addicted and playing for a couple of hours before going to work as well as long into the evening. I can't think of any game before or after that has captured the magic you get while playing through it.

What was the last game you played, and what did you think of it?
It's been pretty busy recently finishing off *Colin McRae Rally 3* so there has not been an enormous amount of time for other games. Last game I really spent time with was *Luigi's Mansion* which I really enjoyed. Still love the nervous whistling and humming.

How many hours a week do you actually spend playing games?
This really varies depending on the stage of the project. The past few months have been pretty intensive so there has not been much time. But I'm taking some time off to catch up on everything that I've missed. When I'm into a game I'll usually play it into the early hours.

What's the first game you look for when you walk into an arcade?
Still always look for a *Defender* machine. Loved mastering the controls.

What's your favourite book, album and film of all time?
William Gibson's 'Neuromancer', 'Synchronicity' by The Police, and 'Blade Runner'.

Which Website do you most regularly visit?
Probably the Oakley Website (www.oakley.com).

What game would you most like to have worked on?
I think *Metal Gear Solid* would have been a cool game to have been involved in. Very different from what I'm working on at the moment.

Of all the game you've been involved in in the past, what's your favourite, and why?
I guess it would have to be the original *Colin McRae Rally*. It was the first game that I produced and guess that's why its so nostalgic. Everyone on the team was completely new and it was the first time we had all worked together. .

What stage is your current project at?
The game is finished and was released on October 25 on PlayStation2 and Xbox.

"I'd like to see more development of audio in games. It would be great to hear more cinematic audio during the game"

Which aspect of it do you think will impress players the most?
I hope that people are impressed with how we have improved the visual look of the game. The environments are more detailed and the cars more realistic than we've ever done before. Yet the graphical design and interface is clear and simple. I like the contrast.

What new development in videogames would you most like to see?
I'd like to see more development of audio in games. There is always a driving force pushing the visuals but the audio seems to move at a much slower pace. It would be great to hear more cinematic audio during the game.

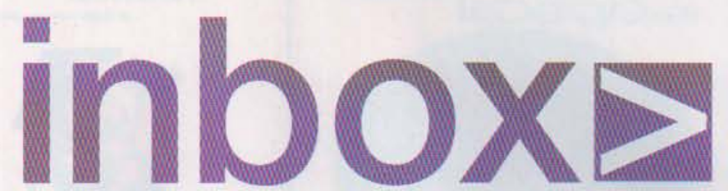
What disappoints you about the industry?
Like the film industry, there is a much greater focus on tried-and-tested formulas rather than on innovation. It would be great to see more diverse and inventive games.

What do you enjoy most about working in the videogame industry?
It's great to be part of an industry that's evolving so quickly. It has already become established as a staple entertainment alternative and it will be fascinating to see how this develops.

Whose work do you most admire?
Miyamoto's obviously but also the work of Masaya Matsuura, the guy that created *Vib Ribbon*. It was just such a clever and original idea. I love the fact that you get new levels just by trying another audio CD.

What new gaming platform are you most looking forward to?
Probably the new backlit Game Boy Advance at the moment, but I'm always interested to see what Nintendo is going to do next.

Videogames: Art or Entertainment? Discuss
I think the answer has to be that they can be either or both. Just as films aim to entertain but can also be seen as art I feel the same about games. Some films aim just to entertain and others are a visual spectacle. The ideal is to have both and many of the great films do this. I think the same applies to games. Most games aim purely to entertain but a few could definitely provide aesthetic pleasure as works of art.



Communicate by post:
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I live in an environment where unfortunately gaming isn't socially accepted. Not that I have ever been subject to any discrimination or told off because of my hobby, but I can always feel my friends' (particularly female ones') contemptuous attitude towards videogames. But a short while ago I went on holiday to Italy with several friends where we had rented a beach apartment. As I'd had some good experiences with non-gamers among my family playing *Samba de Amigo*, I decided to give it a try and bring it to Italy. I knew the risk was big; I mean, carrying the console, the maracas and all the stuff needed for the game and to try playing that thing with several non-gamers could have ended in disaster. RedEye's essay about playing *Mario Kart Advance* in the pub came to my mind.

The first night we were in our apartment, as vodka bottles were opened after supper, I unpacked the DC and showed the maracas to everyone. Their reactions were incredible: five minutes later my friends, most of them women, were arguing with each other over who would get hold of the maracas first. They even asked me to organise a *Samba* meeting back in Switzerland. It was amazing – as if gaming hasn't never consisted solely of *The House of the Dead*-style splatter action; as if every stupid cliché had disappeared; well, as if gaming was alright. They also asked questions about other 'dancing-stuff'.

These games-despising people were just standing there enjoying themselves in front of a telly. Suddenly one maraca broke as a girl, trying hard for a pose, smashed it into the wall. The party was over with a bang. Then they just asked me to order a new one so we could keep shaking another time soon. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. A few days after that I invited the same friends to have dinner in my flat. As they arrived, several consoles were just lying under the TV. Their eyes gazed across my living room and suddenly they noticed my Dreamcast with its standard gamepad attached. With a big bright smile the same girl who had broken my expensive imported maracas shouted at me, "Oh, you haven't got the new ones yet?" At this moment I realised how great *Samba de Amigo* really is, what power actually underlies its entertainment – a power that very few games (if any at all) possess. It fascinates all audiences, breaking the gender and attitude barriers that are preventing videogames from penetrating further in society. For developers, perhaps it's time to rethink all this guns 'n' cars stuff, to open new ways and to offer new entertaining possibilities that everyone can enjoy.
Adrian Crespo

You're not the only one with tales of late night *Samba*-inspired gaming sessions with non-gaming friends. Currently the problem seems to be that the industry isn't doing enough to let non-gamers know that these sorts of videogame experience are available – which is perhaps why average "guns 'n' cars stuff" continues to outsell more inspiring titles such as *Samba de Amigo*.

After reading Edge's response to David Dahl-Hansson (**E**114) I pondered the prospect of a price reduction and what this could mean for an underachieving industry. If software prices were around the £20 mark, as **Edge** suggested, interest in videogames would see the largest upheaval since the introduction of PlayStation.

And there's also the matter of what affordable software pricing would do for originality in games. If I wander into a record shop I frequently find myself taking a chance on a CD that I've never even heard of. But equally frequently I leave videogame shops empty handed because of my reluctance to pay the ridiculously high prices. I'm simply not prepared to take the risk that I'll be disappointed when paying such high prices.

Essentially I end up buying the genres I know I like – which is the curse of this industry. It inevitably deludes publishers into thinking that this is what gamers want. If software prices weren't so high then I'm sure that I along with many others would be willing to take more risks on a game that I might otherwise have overlooked. And as gamers snap up these more obscure titles, publishers would be able to create new franchises and IP. So if the videogame industry really wants to play with the big boys, it will have to introduce cheaper prices
Matthew Thompson

After a quick scan on the Web for up and coming games I realised that as we all mature and grow old, we have all become a bunch of skinflint misers. Why do I say this? Because I read an editorial piece, on various Websites, that some organisation wants to hold a games boycott week where no one buys any games because they are so hideously expensive. That got me reminiscing about how cheap games were when I had my Amstrad CPC464 and my college had a Sinclair Spectrum. Then it clicked. No matter how cheap games are, if they are easy to copy then they will be copied. I am the perfect example of this as I myself copied various £2.99 games from my fellow CPC464ers because all I needed was a twin tape deck. As CD copiers and their ilk get ever cheaper the only way that you can prevent piracy is to go the Nintendo route and create your own medium.

This all brings me to the long-debated point of lower-priced games. The truth is that we have never had it better when it comes to game price points on all platforms. That Web scan I mentioned earlier yielded *Super Mario Sunshine* for £32.99. Now considering that I paid £50 for *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* and a massive £59.99 for *Super Street Fighter 2* it would look like games are getting cheaper not only in actual price but also in real terms. So why all the complaints? We've grown up with videogames, we earn more (I speak for all but me) and they represent an ever decreasing amount of our monthly or annual outgoings. So lets all enjoy the fact that we can get *Super Mario Sunshine* for less than the retail price of the new WaveBird control pad (£34.99, I checked at Live2002)
Anon

"I frequently leave videogame shops empty handed because of my reluctance to pay the high prices. I'm simply not prepared to take the risk that I'll be disappointed"



Adrian Crespo is the latest of many gamers to realise the mainstream appeal of *Samba de Amigo*. It's just a shame that so few non-gamers are aware

See p12 for **Edge**'s report on the Fairplay Campaign. As far as the relationship between pricing and piracy is concerned, intellectual property specialists are apparently convinced that there isn't one (though it's difficult to argue either way). But it's also worth pointing out that although games are indeed cheaper than they have been in the past, they're still perceived to be expensive by mainstream consumers – which is one of the reasons that the audience for videogames has remained relatively small compared to other forms of entertainment. Not everyone has the time or resources to conduct Web searches for cheap prices.

The times when computer games were largely overlooked in the mainstream media look set to end as Acclaim's recent publicity stunts filter through to the red-top tabloids.

Just recently we have witnessed centre spreads in 'The Sun' newspaper of a very different kind thanks to the publishing company's desperation to plug sub-par titles. *Turok Evolution*, for instance, was featured as a 'Dear Deidre…'-style photo casebook, with Tal'Set the prehistoric hunter trying to get to grips with modern times.

This was soon followed with news stories of five unfortunate/lucky saps/people (delete as applicable) who took on the moniker of the famous dinosaur hunter for a measly £500, an Xbox and copy of the game. Most would think the souls who did this sold theirs for too low a price and the media's portrayal may further cement videogames as the preserve of the socially reclusive.

Now, many of your readers will rightly dismiss the press coverage as advertising which was paid for by the company to appear within the pages of Britain's best-read daily. But surely, the costs required to feature a four-page spread in such a publication would be excessive if Acclaim did not feel it would make an impact and – more importantly – recoup some of its costs.

I myself am tempted to believe that its work – while slightly cringe-inducing – could have a knock-on effect in the future. After all, every general election we must tolerate 'The Sun's boasts that it was them "wot won it." Will such ad-features work to win over the masses?

It is also tempting to feel that Acclaim may one day be praised within your very pages for its groundbreaking work that saw the games industry finally convert the stuffy boredom of Middle England households who are often too quick to dismiss videogames as brain-rot.

However, the company's latest stunt for the release of *Burnout 2*, where it offered to pay for any speeding fines incurred on the day of the game's release, drew gasps of horror from within the corridors of power. And once the politicians get involved, arguments almost certainly swing away from the benefits of videogames to the more mundane 'videogame nasties' point of view which only serves to unravel the hard work done by visionaries such as Miyamoto-san and Sony who strive to include their creations as part of the essential fabric of everyday life.

The media relies on shock tactics to grab people's attention – but the mainstream is a fickle and fast-moving arena, and shock can quickly turn to revulsion. Just ask Michael Barrymore. It is time for Acclaim to prove whether it can keep its head above water, or risk sinking in a sea of fury.
Brian Tarran

Acclaim's new marketing strategy has already been mentioned in **Edge**, but it's worth noting that in the company's most recent financial statement, it highlights worse-than-expected sales of *Turok Evolution* as the reason for a shortfall in profits. It remains to be seen how effective the new strategy will be for sales of *Burnout 2* and *BMX XXX* (which three major US retailers are refusing to stock – see Cuttings, p15), but **Edge** can't help agreeing that the company would be better off focusing on producing a diverse and high-quality release portfolio rather than shock tactics that have yet to be proven effective in the short term, and may actually be damaging in the long term.

There has been a lot of talk concerning online play on consoles, and for good reason. Online play opens up a whole new gaming genre to the console market. Many say it will fall short, and many say it will succeed, and many arguments have been made both for and against. The most obvious is that the PC is the leader of the market and quite simply cannot be beaten. Why? Because the PC is not just a games machine. It is a multimedia platform that allows the Internet to be explored to the full, creating almost unlimited potential for games and games communities.

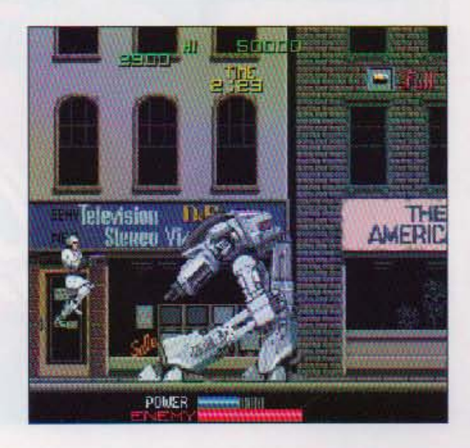
How are we to be expected to create clans on a PlayStation2 or Xbox? Websites need designing for stats and personal achievements, pages of bios, and clan news. Clans form an integral part of online play, not just for members but for an amazing sense of achievement when "SrgntCoBaLt [CPO]" falls to your feet in defeat. It also begs the question, "Why am I paying £30 a month for gaming alone?"

Online play is great but it's not the only reason for shelling out for a broadband connection. What about the endless reams of information that can be accessed? Let's not forget user-created modifications, around which an entire subculture has evolved. Anyone who has sampled the delights of GTKRadiant and Unreal Editor will tell you that not one console game has came close to recreating this, not even the handy Editor that came with *TimeSplitters* came anywhere near.

So again, why shell out for the connection? Another significant argument is that console gamers are of a different ilk than those of the PC fraternity. Not all of them, true, but most. Picture your average console player coming home from the pub and sitting down for a game with a bunch of people he doesn't know. He can't talk to them because he hasn't got a keyboard. He will quickly become bored. Now what? Phone a friend and ask him to play? And how many friends does he have that have the console, the connection and the game?

Anyone who has a keyboard for their

> "The media relies on shock tactics to grab people's attention – but the mainstream is a fast-moving arena, and shock can quickly turn to revulsion. Just ask Michael Barrymore"



Mark Agar argues that the days of showboating are over. But is it just that the type of showing off has changed since the heady days of *RoboCop*?

PlayStation2 is fooling themselves and should bite the bullet and get a PC. You see the problem is that consoles are party machines that you sit down to with your mates and pass the controller back and forth as you slaughter your opponent at *Worms* or *Bust-a-Move* or *GoldenEye* (still the best multiplayer FPS on any console). Microsoft spokespeople have said that they want hundreds of thousands of players by the end of next year. These guys are fooling themselves and should pool their resources into creating better console games and not trying to make out that their hardware is something it is not.

Quite simply, if you want to play online get a PC. After all, if you're the type that wants to then you probably already have one.

Mike Scholfield

Both Microsoft and Sony have put considerable effort into ensuring that online console gaming will match the PC for sheer enjoyment, with provision for buddy lists and voice communication to obviate the need for a keyboard. But you're right to be sceptical; it isn't clear whether the mainstream consumer is ready for playing online against strangers yet – though **Edge** certainly hopes it is.

Your article about MAME took me back to the halcyon days of my youth. Especially the comment about old games allowing players to really hone their skills.

During my A-levels a single pound would get me a bag of chips, a can of coke and still leave 20p for the arcade machines, out the back, to the left of the fryers. What did I spend my 20p on? Well I only needed 10p to wile away the hours on *RoboCop* (sadly missing from your top 100).

At the beginning of term, maybe ten people would play during the lunch hour, but come Christmas it was a mad dash to get to the machine first, as by then we were all masters. I'll never forget the time that I become the first person to reach the final boss. This was quite a coup as myself and my friend Jake were both the best players. While others favoured *Shinobi*, or a rather weird and wonderful shoot 'em up called *Xain'd Sleena*, Jake and I had a thing for *RoboCop*. As I approached the final boss the room became still, breaths were held, and the bastard beat me. Upset, I stood aside for Jake to begin his marathon at the joystick and, having learned from my mistake, he played through to the boss and won.

The point of my rambling? Games in those days were designed to provoke one-upmanship and showing off. Finishing *Tomb Raider VII* hardly has the same thrill, does it? Admittedly I have not been in an arcade in years, but the last time I did I played *Tekken*. Maybe I don't have the time anymore, but where was the magic?

Mark Agar

The decline of the arcade sector is certainly regrettable, but if you look hard there's still some opportunity for showboating – particularly in Japanese arcades, where head-to-head gaming is commonplace. But now that multiplayer gaming can be enjoyed at home with friends perhaps those showboating opportunities have evolved. Certainly **Edge**'s recent maraca-based virtuosity was enjoyed by just a small circle of reasonably close friends – rather than the large crowds that used to be drawn by coin-op ostentation.

An initial moment of disbelief, followed by surprise, and then sheer pleasure and a stirring of memories that I would never have expected to emerge again.

It's the mid- to late-1980s. The era of the Spectrum and Commodore 64 is at its peak, threatened only by the rumours of a new Commodore machine and, surely not, an Atari computer of unheard power. But for now, the Spectrum owners hate the Commodore owners and vice versa, and all is good in the world.

The time is at hand, the latest releases for that month are finally upon us, and each of the camps bought its respective version. Am I talking about games? No, the pinnacle of hardcore gaming at this time was purchasing the latest copy of 'Zzap!' or 'Crash' (or for the wealthy few, both). And what made this such an event for so many, was the stunning covers that graced these magazines, creations so much more descriptive of the exclusives that were to be found inside the covers, that the reviews themselves were almost a poor second.

Blunder through time to the year 2002, where magazines have the latest computer-generated artwork, cel-shaded and shining, perfectly rendered, spoilt only by the blurb which so cruelly is splattered about them. And then there is **E**115. No blurb. No over-useage of the word 'exclusive'. Just a wonderful example of the way magazines used to be.

And only one thing is missing. The small words in one corner, that were a guarantee of the care and, dare I say it, love, that went into the creation of the image… 'Oliver Frey'. Thank you for some happy memories revisited.

Paul Millett

On the assumption that many readers own several consoles, would you be in a position to consider providing a comparative analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of multiplatform releases such as *Burnout*, etc? In my view such an insert would provide some guidance to those readers wondering which version would suit them best. In this regard, I appreciate that certain multiplatform games are released on one console before the other two, and thus the value of such an analysis would necessarily be retrospective.

Paul Astley

Edge does already try to highlight the major differences between the various versions of multiplatform releases if they are significant. But many cross-platform releases simply don't differ across platforms, and there's usually little to distinguish between the different versions in terms of quality.

"Online play is great but it's not the only reason for shelling out for a broadband connection. What about the endless reams of information that can be accessed?"





Are developers doing enough for colour-blind gamers? Nebulus argues that games like *Perfect Dark* and *Metal Gear Solid 2* include sections that are almost unplayable, but death_himself points to the use of vibration as an alternative solution

From the forum

A selection of choice cuts from Edge-Online's discussion outlet (http://forum.edge-online.com)

Subject: **Gaming through the eyes of an unfortunate**
Poster: **Nebulus**
We all love games, that's why we're here. But being colour-blind ruins my perspective of them. The lush colours of Hyrule Field? Forget it. The blocks in *Tetris* are different colours? Nope. The colour of your team-mates (and therefore enemies) in *Perfect Dark*? Yeah, right. Games often rely on colour to distinguish an object or simply to add beauty to a game. Games that specifically rely on colour coordination hurt me.

Those colour-sequenced 'code-breaking' sections in *Headhunter*? About 30 attempts. The similar *Dino Crisis* colour puzzles? Couldn't do them. *Bust-a-Move*? I wish. It's a simple fact. I am unfortunate. So are many others. And some games can't help it. But there are a few which just don't seem to have taken it into consideration. A bit like those games that don't include subtitles.

I'm sure it's possible for developers to devote just a small thought to how a range of different people might be affected.

Poster: **Jonathan_Kerr**
Damn, that sucks. I kinda had the same problem with *Metal Gear Solid 2* when you had to detect the bombs by beeping sounds. Seeing as I'm deaf, I had to get really close before I could really pinpoint the sounds.

I've always wanted a black and white game with one other colour, like red (for blood) to come out. From what I hear *Shenmue II* (for Xbox) has five filters that allow the gamer to play in black and white, sepia tones, full colour plus a couple of others that I can't remember.

Poster: **death_himself**
I think it's hard to cater for the colour-blind, I suppose they could have numbers, but still. But I can't believe that they didn't use vibration as well as sound for that thing in *Metal Gear Solid 2*, Kerr.

And as for subtitles, I think it's something all videogames should have. It's just nicer not to have to listen carefully to the bad accents and I would much prefer companies to stick with the original dialogue for foreign games and just add subtitles, it's the same with films, most people I know prefer to read subtitles than listen to a dubbed film.

Subject: **Why complain about SNES ports?**
Poster: **Ridley**
A brief look at the latest batch of Game Boy Advance titles to be released generates the following: *Smuggler's Run*, *ATV Quad Power Racing*, *Driver 2*, *Colin McRae Rally 2*, *Silent Scope*, *Spy Hunter*, *Disney's Magical Quest*, *Sega Smash Pack*, *Defender of the Crown*, *Speedball II* and *Dungeons & Dragons*. What a dire list. I'll take the SNES ports any day. Question is, should Nintendo enforce a stricter quality policy, similar to that of the 8bit and 16bit eras?

Poster: **Duffinator**
For me, the ports are fantastic. These are games that I loved to play ten years ago, and I still own on SNES. But now we can play them on the move on Game Boy Advance. *Super Mario World* and *Yoshi's Island* are a joy on the plane and train. In many ways complaints against the ports are like complaining that films out on video should not be released on DVD, despite the extras that the new format brings.

There is also plenty of original content on the Game Boy Advance (*Advance Wars*, *Denki Blocks*, *Kuru Kuru Kururin* spring immediately to mind); plenty of updates (for example *Mario Kart Advance*, *Metroid Fusion*). And I can't be the only one really looking forward to playing *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* again?

Subject: **It's a-me! A-Mario! I can'a talk!**
Poster: **DJ Sack**
Should Mario talk in a videogame? The only words I've heard are "It's a-me, a-Mario", "Press start to play," and some other small phrases. So should Mario talk or will it ruin his image? *Super Mario Sunshine* has Mario saying nothing, just small grunts and "Hmmm hemm" to signify he'll do something.

For Sonic it worked great – the voice fitted Sonic perfectly and really added to the *Sonic Adventure* games… but would it be the same for Mario?

Poster: **Fade Out**
Nah, Mario is your avatar through which you explore a world and play around like you're six-years-old again.

If Mario talks, it ruins that whole feeling of actually being there. However, Sonic is completely different, he's got a whole 'cool' character. Mario is a blank canvas.

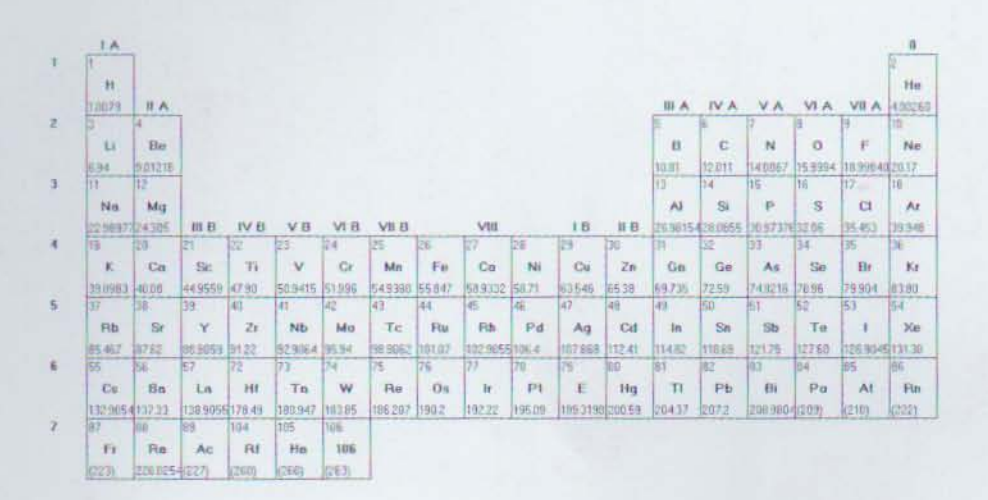
Poster: **Yvash**
Ugh. Does anyone mind if I don't project my mental image onto a fat Italian dwarf plumber in dungarees?

"Ports are fantastic. These are games that I loved to play ten years ago, and I still own on SNES. But now we can play them on the move on Game Boy Advance"

Next month



Global underground: do you really know what's happening in the rest of the world?



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4	19 K 39.0983	20 Ca 40.08	21 Sc 44.9559	22 Ti 47.90	23 V 50.9415	24 Cr 51.996	25 Mn 54.9380	26 Fe 55.847	27 Co 58.9332	28 Ni 58.71	29 Cu 63.546	30 Zn 65.38	31 Ga 69.735	32 Ge 72.59	33 As 74.9216	34 Se 78.96	35 Br 79.904	36 Kr 83.80
5	37 Rb 85.467	38 Sr 87.62	39 Y 88.9059	40 Zr 91.22	41 Nb 92.9064	42 Mo 95.94	43 Tc 98.9062	44 Ru 101.07	45 Rh 102.9055	46 Pd 106.4	47 Ag 107.868	48 Cd 112.41	49 In 114.82	50 Sn 118.69	51 Sb 121.75	52 Te 127.60	53 I 126.9045	54 Xe 131.30
6	55 Cs 132.9054	56 Ba 137.33	57 La 138.9055	72 Hf 178.49	73 Ta 180.947	74 W 183.85	75 Re 186.207	76 Os 190.2	77 Ir 192.22	78 Pt 195.09	79 E [illegible]	80 Hg 200.59	81 Tl 204.37	82 Pb 207.2	83 Bi 208.9804	84 Po (209)	85 At (210)	86 Rn (222)
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